MONSTER. Part Two: Songbirds

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MONSTER. Part Two: Songbirds

by kildeer

Summary

"Who has not asked himself at some time or other: am I a monster or is this what it means to be a person?"

~ Clarice Lispector

Repress

Will:

The stream is swift-moving
Wind chime voiced and dreamy
In the cool morning
Of a hot summer day
When steam rises from the water.
This stream is mine and in it
I am untouchable.
Safe from the great stag
Which emerges and retreats
Between the trees
To watch me
An unknown world held
Within the bone cradle
Of his antlers, breath misting
As he stamps his hooves.

My body is not in the stream.
It sits within a cage
At the Baltimore State Hospital
For the Criminally Insane
Where it is dressed in a grey jumpsuit
Fastened with velcro.
Where it is surveilled, recorded
Talked at by Dr. Chilton who sits
At a safe distance
Hoping for a breakthrough
With his prize pig.
He knows I'm not going
To talk to him.
He knows
Who I'm waiting for.

I return to the stream
Where the one I wait for
Rises from the rushing water -
All sinew, skin stretched
Sharp-boned, starving, carved
From the heartwood of an ebony.
The Other
Who is also

Hannibal:

Will
Wants to see me
And I feel rather inclined
To give him what he wants.
Dr. Du Maurier cautions that Will
Means to manipulate me
As though I don't already know this.
As though I should not welcome it.
As though I have forgotten
The taste of his blood
When the emptiness
Of his chair in my office
Conjures a restless ghost.

Will:

It's strange hearing
Your voice in person
When it's all I hear
In my head.

Hannibal:

I too find your absence
On my days like a watermark.
Unexpected
The butchery and bindings
Of friendship.

Will:

You're not my friend.
You never were
And one day I'm going
To make you feel this.

Hannibal:

I appreciate your honesty, Will
More than you know
Even as I regret
Your misguided rejection of me.

Will:

I've been uncertain
About a lot of things in my life.
By comparison

This rejection of you
Is my thread through the labyrinth.

Hannibal:

Dream is the personalized myth
Myth the depersonalized dream.

I wonder what you will find
At your labyrinth's center.
My desire has ever only been
To help you find and know yourself.

Curious, then
How I'm pulled into ever-deepening
Knowledge of you.
In your absence I am called
To stand in your shoes.
To look through your eyes
And see death
As I imagine you
Must see it -
The hollowed-heart despair of love bound
In each loss, reverberating
Outwards through time
Inwards through flesh, the commission
Which compels those who seek justice
Wordlessly issued by a bloated corpse.
Curious
To know the prima materia
Of your pain.

Will:

Winston keeps running away
To find me, to wait on my porch
As if his devotion will
Summon me to his side.
I try not to think
About how much
I want him to forget me
And how much I hope
He never does.

Alana says I can't be held accountable
For crimes I don't remember
Which just means Hannibal
Can't be held accountable
For crimes I don't remember.

In the meantime there's murder
Bodies dredged
Derangement afoot
And Beverly comes to me
Where I sit cuffed
And chained to a table
For my professional opinion
Which probably says something
About the profession.

This killer is an artist
As so many are
Painting in skin
Perfecting his technique.
I offer what I can
And return to my dungeon
Where the orderlies can't mop fast enough
To keep the cells from smelling
Of piss and shit and semen.
The arrival of chilly canned peas
Watery coffee and shoe leather steak
Turns my stomach but I try
And chew
And remember

Hannibal
Tilting my head back
Coaxing my mouth open
And forcing a plastic tube
Down my throat, dissolving
Into cold sweat, esophageal
Tissue gouged, stomach
Writhing in protest to expel
Abigail's ear

Which isn't here
On the plastic hospital tray
But I can still feel
Her rubbery bile-slick skin
The seashell shape of cartilage
In my mouth, and
It was real.
I know it was real.

I can't eat anymore
But I can cry, and I do
Away from the bars, into
My pillow like a child

In my stream
Where they can't see me
But he can.
Where I keep asking
How?
Because I can't bear to ask

Why?

Craquelure

Chapter Summary

Hannibal analyzes the body of Roland Umber, and consults Will on his emerging profile of the killer.

Hannibal:

When Dr. Du Maurier says
She can no longer be my therapist
That she's seen enough of what lies
Beneath my seams, I tell her about Will -
Salt-thinned by tears, pleading for my help
From within his cage. I tell her
I feel the end of a thread not yet lost
In my fingers, the seed skin still splitting
As life chases the sun.

Dr. Du Maurier says
Will and I deserve each other.
I couldn't agree more.

The shell is cracked, and the man within
Lies cold in the autopsy room
Where I still try to see him
As Will would -
Eyelet wounds
Torn dusky skin
The bloody concavity
Where skull struck cliff during his fall.
It's clear that Will is with us now
As more than just the ghost on my periphery.

I hear his voice from Beverly's mouth
And know she has sought him in secret
Presenting his conclusion as her own.
Unfond as I am of plagiarists, I point this out
So that she and Jack will decamp to discuss
Their respective moral stances
On consulting a serial killer, while I
Apply my particular skill set
To the body of Roland Umber.

I smell water -
Of the stream from which he was pulled
Of the river which caught him.
I smell his brains, and the rock
Which spilled them. The last touches
Of a world which failed to save him
Caught in his killer's craquelure.

Will:

You can come closer.
I promise I won't bite.

Hannibal:

If biting would be therapeutic
You're welcome to try.
Are we friends today, Will?

Will:

If friendship would be therapeutic
You're welcome to try, although
My reciprocity will be limited
From within a cage.

Hannibal:

I imagine it will also be limited
By your desire for revenge
If that still remains. You described
Your rejection of me as a lifeline.
Where has it led you thus far?

Will:

As far as I can tell
Nowhere near an exit.

Hannibal:

This labyrinth of yours was built in madness
Its elements molded by fever heat.
You will not be able to trust
The spectres which emerge from it.

Will:

An inconvenient caveat
When searching for the Minotaur.

Hannibal:

And when continuing to scent serial killers
In secret for the FBI.

Will:

Play to your strengths, they say.

Hannibal:

I would question the benefit
Of opening your mind to a new killer
So soon after its overthrow.

Will:

I'm being warehoused
Like an animal, Dr. Lecter.
Having a piece
Of the life I've lost
Makes me feel
Like I'm still human.

Hannibal:

I just want you to be careful
As to how you repair the cracks in your walls.
But as long as we're on the subject
Tell me what you saw in this killer
When you reached out into
The sepulchral industry of his mind.
Why does he do it?

Will:

Why does anyone seek the source
Of a strange sound in the night
Unarmed and barefoot
When they could just as easily
Sleep?

He has cracks, too.

Eye

Chapter Summary

Will and Hannibal contemplate the Muralist and his work.

Will:

The killer looked at his victim
Roland Umber
And saw the perfect ingredient -
A brushstroke in just
The right shade, and he was
Collected
Cultivated
Made an art. What
The killer didn't know
Was that Roland would survive
And tear himself free. Hannibal
When you looked at this victim
What did you see?

Hannibal:

A crying out
In the darkness of a grain bin.
A gathering of limbs, bodies entwined
Strangers connected, an intimacy
Life would never allow.
In death, their beauty sealed.
An Eye demanding
To see and be seen.

What does it see, Will?

Will:

A ring of bodies, pale sclera
In the darkness of a grain bin.
A knot of bodies, dim iris
In light from the aperture above.
It is despair, and it sees
Nothing.

Or
It was meant
To see nothing, until
You, John Doe 21
Curled white light
Of the pupil.
Who are you?

I
Am you, naked
Waiting in the dark
For Hannibal to kneel
Beside me, bowing
His head in the temple light
As he threads his needle, long
Sharper than any thorn, thread
Thick and strong, hands sure
As he pierces me
Binds me, his voice
Closer to me than
My skin -

Nothing can be understood
Until it is observed
And nothing can be healed
Until it is understood.
Only those who are brave enough
Strong enough
May undertake this work
But the work must be done all the same.

Hannibal:

John Doe 21
Whose name will be known soon
Obedient as the desperate often are
Removes his clothes and allows me
To guide him to the center of his despairing
Eye, the masterwork of man
The puncture and sigh of each stitch
Asking why
Without hope of answer
Until plea becomes rebuke
Defiant duty. My
Gift to you is one of sight, that I
Have seen you, and give you
To time, where you will be
Immortalized.

Resilience

Chapter Summary

Will and Bedelia meet for the first time.

Will:

I can keep the light, hold
My stream in a pocket
Of sleepy morning where
Time is kept at bay, but
I cannot separate
My mind from the world.
Cannot help but see
Death in the water -
Soft sunken ships carried
Past me to sea, the ache
Of their vulnerable once
Cherished bodies now
Given to break
Apart on the waves.

I feel someone
Behind me and open
My eyes, turning
To the bars where she stands
In the weighted underlight -
Elegant and rigid
A Hitchcock blonde
With that same air
Of quiet tragedy
Poised precisely
Between tears, triumph
And rage.

Who are you?

Bedelia:

One who has seen what waits in the night
Just beyond the edge of the forest.
My name is Bedelia Du Maurier.

Will:

Hannibal Lecter's therapist.
I don't know
What I was expecting.

Bedelia:

Nor I, but now that I see you
I feel as though I understand completely.

Will:

Understand what?

Bedelia:

Why he is compelled
To watch you break.

There is a kind of challenge in resilience -
An almost desperate pleasure
In cutting a worm
To watch it grow a new tail
Or injuring oneself in the knowledge
That the body will heal.

Hannibal feels that this breaking
Will strengthen you
But I do not believe
He intends to abandon you here.

Will:

What do you mean
He intends?

She steps across
The safety line
The beautiful mask
Of her face untouched
While her eyes, urgent
Call me to the bars
Where our hands
Almost intertwine, and
She has just enough time
Before the guards
Pull her away
To whisper

Bedelia:

I believe you.

Which will be cold comfort
As I take flight, leaving behind
A house full of drop cloth creating ghosts
In the shapes of a human life
Along with the last gift he ever gave me -
A cut crystal perfume bottle
Which holds the light
Like a star for him to find.

Alternative

Chapter Summary

> Will's trial begins, and he struggles with the different versions of himself being represented (and misrepresented), as well as his conflicting feelings about Hannibal.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will:

I suppose the alternative
Has always been death
But in freedom I could
Sometimes forget.
Now
I feel death draw close
Breathing in the shadows
Wearing my face.

In my dreams this Will
Has gone limp in the chair
Still smoking, pumped full
Of lightning, cooked
In his own skin
As the clock ticks forward
Then back
And back again
Until the white hot
Tree branching through
His body ungrows
Unpierces his heart
Unboils his saliva
And retracts its tines
Through soft sponge brain
Leaving him, alive
Again for a moment more
Until I
It?
The Other?
Steps forward
To flip the switch again.

In the courtroom I listen to
The Story of Will Graham
And feel as though he
Is the surprise evil twin
Who emerges at the end
Of a soap opera -
Intelligent Psychopath
Master Manipulator
Serial Killer
Cannibal
The Other

Who is also me
And in him I
Whatever piece of me
Remains, becomes
Porous, crumbling
In my palm like
A piece of chalk in the rain.

Will Graham, up for auction
Two models -
Guilty
Not guilty.
Neither of them innocent
Neither of them me
But the dead man in the chair
Doesn't care about the lie
That saves his life
Does he?

Hannibal Lecter, outside my cell
One man -
Friend
Enemy.
So welcome
And so feared
But when he looks at me
Why do I feel
Like a cup
Being filled?

Hannibal:

Are we friends today, Will?

Will:

I wish
You would stop
Asking me that.

Hannibal:

Why?

Will:

Because I don't
Know the answer.

Hannibal:

What if I admit
That I may have been mistaken?

Will:

About me?
That would be
Unbelievable.

Hannibal:

It seems there is a chance
That your long-sought Copycat
May exist after all.

Will:

You don't say.

Hannibal:

And he may be trying
To exonerate you.

Will:

Why
Would he do that?

Hannibal:

It could be that he resents you
Receiving the credit for his work.

Will:

Why else
Would he do it?

Hannibal:

He cares
What happens to you.

Will:

It's difficult to believe
That anyone really could.
In order to save my life
We need to prove
It's worth saving, but
The testimony can't be
Emotional
Unbiased
Tainted by love.
The goal is not to prove
That I am innocent
Or loved, merely
That I am
Not guilty.
In order to save my life
We need to prove
It's not worth ending.

I am in my stream
When Dr. Chilton testifies.
His Will Graham pretends
Obfuscates, plays God
Lies, concocts dysfunction
As sympathetic alibi, and I
Focus on the cold water
The music of my stream
While trying not to feel
Flayed, no more merciful
Anonymity, displayed
And I can't scream here.
Not now.

Not for the child
Who didn't understand
Why everything hurt.
Why everything
Even kindness
Burned, beyond

Narrowed eyes
And a diagnosis of -
That boy ain't right.
But I want someone
To scream for him.
I want him to be able
To look away when
Death is handed to him
For his autograph.

My admirer?

Hannibal:

Tell me what you see, Will.

Will:

I see a suitor
Trying too hard, copying verse
From his textbook, not
My Copycat, but then
You already knew that.

Hannibal:

It didn't seem
Like so much to ask for.

Will:

The truth never does.

Hannibal:

Is truth so important?
Especially in light of

Will:

The alternative?

You wanted me
To look at these pictures
And agree
That this is the Copycat.

Hannibal:

I wanted to help you find your way
Out of the labyrinth, and to cease being
An enemy in your eyes.
I cannot bear the thought
Of abandoning you here, Will.

Will:

You haven't yet.

Hannibal:

This killer has presented himself at the gates
To draw the fire from you.
Does a condemned man care
About the lie which saves his life?

Will:

Condemned
Is not redeemed
Innocent, or trusted.
A condemned life
Saved by a lie
Is a life forever crippled
By its fall from grace.

Hannibal:

But it's still life
And yours is
You are
Too important
To go to waste.

Will:

It is still life
I suppose.
Carried in the mouth
Of a lion, perhaps
Hoping that his teeth
Will not turn on you
As you crawl into
The wet hot dark
So I say yes

And when the doors open
In the courtroom, I am called

From my stream by the sound
Of his footsteps. When
Did I learn to know Hannibal
By his walk, and why
Do I feel each impact
Palm the underside
Of my stomach?
He is straight-backed
Calm, seemingly
Oblivious to his own
Magnetism.
My Janus-faced friend.
My mythic enemy.

His Will Graham
Is being framed
By a copycat killer.
His Will Graham
Is innocent, and I can't
Retreat to my stream
When he speaks, because
His Will Graham
Is me.

Chapter End Notes

This poem was such a beast, and I'm still *really* happy with it, especially the ending :) <3

Saved

Will:

In my dream I hear
The dull bell beats
Of the stag's hooves
And the heavy iron
Of my cell door
Opens on tortured hinges
A silent offer
Which I take, rising
Stepping into
The passage of my prison
Stones heavy with threat
Of collapse.
The stag is leaving
But pauses, looking back
And I know that
He will never leave me -
Messenger
And guardian
Of what?
But before I can follow
Begin to ascend
Hannibal calls to me
From where he stands
At the threshold of my cage
Half in shadow
Half in light
An unvoiced question
Beckoning me
To return.

When I wake
If I wake, I check
Each corner twice
To know I wake
Alone.

Hannibal:

Access to my instrument is limited, not denied
However, it would be a lie
To say that curiosity alone compels me now.
A lie to claim that this is enough -

Standing in Will's shoes
Seeing through Will's eyes
Sitting across from Will's empty chair.
I begin to see the edges
The shape of what would satisfy
And it fills me with that reckless need
Which makes starving men kill
And careful men love.

Will:

Alana brings me the news
That the judge overseeing my trial
Has been murdered.
More than murdered, made
An *example* of, displayed
In a tableau
Of Boschian subtlety.
Mistrial
Which is not
Innocent
Guilty, or
Otherwise.
The Story of Will Graham
On hiatus, derailed
By an admirer
With a lover's lack
Of patience.

Alana thinks I'm a killer
But she's here.
I can feel her pity
Her grief
Her righteous indignation
On my behalf.
Maybe even
A limping, bruised affection
And it's something.
It's enough to make me
Wish I could tell her
She's the one
I dream of every night.
But in the silence
Between us, I think
We both know
I'm out of her hands
Forever.

Blood Knot

Chapter Summary

Will and Abigail go fishing in his imaginary stream.

Will:

In the morning light, Abigail's eyes
Are clear pale blue, like the dream
Of spring which lives deep
In the heart of an iceberg
As she watches me tie the blood knot.
I've brought her to my stream
To teach her how to fish.

She asks
Would this have been
Your happier life?

Yes.

Thanks for showing me.

Thanks for coming. I
Wasn't sure whether
You would want to.

She gives me a wry half smile
Narrowing her eyes.

This is your stage, you know.

For all the control I have over it
You could have fooled me.

That's why you waited so long
To bring me here, isn't it.
You were afraid
I would still be bleeding. Trailing him
Like a cobweb in my hair.

Yes.

Or you were afraid I would point at you
Like something out of A Christmas Carol
And command you to stop running
From the truth. From the memory
Of my death living in your hands
When you saw yourself killing me.

Yes.

She nods, the corners of her mouth tight
Not quite able to smile this away.

I never asked to be
So important to you.
Or to him.
You could have just
Left me alone.

I thought I could help.
I'm sorry, Abigail. But
I need you to know
I'm going to catch him.
I'm going to hurt him
For you.

She looks up at me
Her eyes full of winter
In our warm summer morning.

If you want my advice
Stay here, where anything is possible
Because nothing is.
You don't want to see
What comes next.

Mellificāre

Chapter Summary

> Hannibal reflects on life, death, Bella & Jack, Beverly & Will conspiring together, Will trying to recover his memories, medicinal cannibalism, it's a whole thing.

Hannibal:

In life we find an uncomfortable negotiation
Constantly in flux, between
Peace and survival, comfort and truth
And the prices demanded.
Out of love, Bella has chosen survival
At the expense of her peace
So that Jack may have comfort
In denial of the truth.
The tectonic plates of her anger have been
Drug-weighted beneath an ocean of sleep
From which she surfaces briefly, in pain
To see her body sloughing away.

The truth can be comforting in its bitterness
In its unassailable self-possession, as indifferent
To those who would challenge and manipulate
As to those allowing their lungs to fill with it.
Truth avows, *I can wait*, while
Comfort fears rupture of its cushioned womb
Peace keeps breathless watch in the war room
And Survival tunnels beneath the gate.
Those who would not go gentle rage
Through battle tied with Truth’s ribbons.
Their Lady of the Righteous Cause
Who surely blesses their blood in the dirt.

Such a crusader is Will, who stopped believing
In that good night long ago. My soul’s
Dogged pilgrim, so out of love with hope
That he consents to hurt for a glimpse of me.
Sodium amytal hath been his timeless end
As Chilton gleefully reports, cup brimming
Full of notes for his exclusive dossier
His harvest from a golden hive, finally surrendered.

Rejecting all else for Truth alone, Will sets himself
On the kaleidoscopically branching road of memory.
I wish I could be there with him, as no one was with me
But after all I suppose, in a sense, I will be.

Compelled by Will's fervor, it would seem
Beverly too has taken up Truth's colors
Though she wears them covertly
As one who still has much to lose.
She watches me now, more carefully
And I can't help but think of Will's Ripper -

> *A translator of such perfect skill that he can't resist deviation*
> *Can't resist that single misplaced punctuation mark.*

Curious and wonderful, to have one's portrait painted so deftly.
The long-sought artist haunted, blindfolded, not ready
To see his own work in the full light of day. Oh warriors
What will be left of you, when your Lady has her way?

When Survival becomes torture, and Truth drinks your tears
I would draw you a bath of honey, heavy dark gold
Ambrosia stolen from the gods. I would help you
Sink in warmth, held safely, and breathe deep
As Comfort slowly forms your new skin, filling
Every empty space, lifting each organ in its liquid light -
An elegant woman selecting the most perfect fruit at market
Holding each up to the sun with a smile, satisfied.
When Peace has reigned one hundred years
And your bath has gone black, the healers would come
To harvest, slicing bars of ancient honeyflesh
Your hard-won Comfort given, as a blessing, to others.

Bella wears dove colors, holding herself with grace
More alive now than she has been in months.
Full of liberation and gratitude
She bequeaths her body to my care.
The morphine seems to recognize its cue, unseen hands
Snipping threads one by one, and I watch, rapt
As she is carried away, ankles rolling inwards
Her white shoes sliding quietly against the carpet.
These moments of negotiation are too many to be
A serious consideration of divinity, which leaves us
To parse benefit and loss, half-blind in humanity
Ascribing fate to nothing more nor less than a coin toss.

Believe

Chapter Summary

Will recovers a memory and confronts a painful truth.

Will:

Chilton's drugs are quick
And I surrender myself
To the light above, flashing
A strobe, metronomic.
Summoned to Hannibal's voice
Like a lightning rod, I try
To collect the shards of breaking
Clocks and time, even the lines
Of Hannibal's face, to which
I can't stop turning
For answers.

In my dream
There is a dining room beyond
The bars of my cell, in which I
Corpse-pale and crying
Point a gun at Abel Gideon
And beg Hannibal
To tell me the truth.
He doesn't.
Of course he doesn't.
And I watch my Self
Go away.

Absent and present
At once, the Other
Will Graham standing, seizing
Beneath a painting of Leda
And her swan, and I watch as
Hannibal cares for me -
Stepping close
Lifting my eyelids
Checking my pulse
Pushing my wet hair
From my forehead and

It is so strange to watch
Like looking at the picture
Of my brain, knowing
And not knowing
This is a part of me.

Hannibal leaves me
Where I quake and sits
Calmly, gun at hand
To talk to Abel Gideon
About identity
And because I can't live
Without pain, I wake
With knowledge.

A few months and just
As many lifetimes ago
You made me breakfast
And I wanted to believe

What?
And why?

I was right about you.
I knew I was right
But it wouldn't hurt like this
Like a splintered rib with every breath
If I hadn't wanted
To be wrong
Would it?

I wanted to believe in you
When you asked me to keep your secrets.
I wanted to believe in you
When I choked on Abigail's ear.
I wanted to believe in you
When they found my fishing lures.
I wanted to believe in you
When we stood in that kitchen together.
I wanted to believe in you
When you said you believed in me.
I wanted to believe in you
When you took the stand for me.
I wanted to believe in you
When you made me soup.
I wanted to believe in you
When you wanted to be my friend.

And today, when Beverly asks
What the Ripper does with his trophies
I realize that I still wanted to believe in you.
My calling is to see and imagine the worst
To understand it, and I have failed
Because I have failed
To stop believing in you.
Because I keep telling myself
That I have found
The bottom of the well.

And why you?
Of all people who might
Wish me well, who might
Understand, why does
My heart's blind spot
Persist after you?

Maybe there was a room
Dark and closed away so deep
I had forgotten about it
Forgotten how to find it
Forgotten I had left
A part of my Self alone there
Until you opened the curtains
Already inside, and I
Wanted to believe
That meant something.

Beverly

Chapter Summary

Will is brought to the observatory.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will:

A dangerous killer, I am dressed
Bound all in white like a mummy
Ritualized preparation for a journey
And the way my orderlies look at me
Without seeing, and touch me
Without feeling, renders me
Absent, invisible.
It's almost funny
When the mask is placed
Over my face
Its buckles fastened
At the back of my skull.
For a moment I had forgotten
My animating principle.

I am wheeled on a dolly
Serial killer cargo
Out of the hospital.
It feels strange to remember
That I am not removed
From time, that months have passed
Spring and summer lost
Fall returned, and the heavy
Milk-clouded sky is
Too big and bright
The massive blind eye
Of a crouching god
And I am at once afraid of
And grateful for
My smallness.

Now that I know
His handwriting
I feel him winking at me
As the doors of my transport van
Open to reveal
The observatory.
I hear his voice curled
Deep and warm in my ear -

A fitting venue for revelation
Wouldn't you say?
Where man looks up
At that which looks down.

I am rolled inside
Where Jack waits, where

Beverly

It is silent
In the room as Jack
Unfastens, unbuckles
Unbinds me and the edges
Of my body blur and prickle
Like static as I step
Forward.

I was wrong
To say it is silent
Here. There is the sound
Of water dripping like
The limping heartbeat
Of a small dying animal.

I don't want to know you
Beverly.
I don't want to see him
When I look at you.
I don't want to know
How you died.
I don't want to feel
How it felt to kill you.
I don't want to perform
My one remaining function
But it's the only reason
I'm allowed to be here
And above the mosquito buzz
Of him, I hear you

Gentle, steady and tough
Telling me
To get to work.

The acrylic plates pressing
Your sectioned body
Like microscope slides
Melt away and you are
Reunited, a time-lapse
Of trabeculae branching
Through broken bones
Resheathed, mending
Skin cells advancing
In happy waves to hold you
Close, until you stand
Whole in front of me
So I can kill you again.

So I can strangle you
Pass your frozen body
Through a band saw
Over and over with expert care
Unhurried and focused.
So I can curate you
According to my judgement
And my satisfaction, ensuring
That you will be remembered
Through the lens of me.

The observatory is silent, save
The heartbeat of water
From Beverly's thawing corpse
Making bloody puddles
On the floor, and I realize
We were friends.
I remember you
And all the little ways
You kept trying
To reach out to me
When I didn't make it easy.
When I was oblivious.
You answered my calls
In the middle of the night
And listened because
You cared about me.

And I did this to you.
When you asked for my help

I withheld it, bargained
Until I broke you
Until I made you my hunting dog
Until I won your belief.
Last night as I slept
Safe behind bars
My dreams full of Hannibal
You went out hunting
And found your death
At his hands.
I am the reason you are caught
In his teeth.

In the silence of this gallery
Where I can all but feel him
Watching, waiting
For my review
Of his latest piece
Where the edges
Of Beverly's severed skin
Begin to wither like petals
I face the final question
Posed by all of my ghosts -

Now that you've seen my death
What are you going to do about it?

Chapter End Notes

Yah, this one was painful to write :(

Hawks

Chapter Summary

Will does what he can to get revenge from within a cage.

Hannibal:

I begin by cleaning Beverly's kidney
Slipping it free of the renal capsule
Halving the organ and scooping out
The twin lobes of custardy white fat.
A choir sings Hildegard, *The Fire of Creation*
As I turn the handle of the meat grinder
And Beverly emerges in gleaming coils.
Reduced to quintessence, then elevated
Once more, reborn in herbs, oil and fire.
Delivered at last to my table
In tribute to her courage
And in honor of my survival.
I eat, and
Think about Will.

Will:

I wake, and
Think about cages.
A series of cages contained
Within each other endlessly -
Organs caged by skin
Skeleton tree leafy
With blood and meat
Cells within tissue
Atoms within molecules
Cages all the way down
To the smallest particle
With no escape.

Beyond these walls people
Move their bodies freely
From one place to another
Unaware of the fact

That they are mysterious
Their deepest essence untouched
And that this is their most
Priceless possession.
I've stopped caring
If an orderly walks past my cell
When I'm on the toilet.

Here
My shower schedule tells me
What day of the week it is.
On Monday, Wednesday, and Friday
I am stripped, one wrist cuffed
To a hook in the wall
And given a bar of soap
While two orderlies monitor me
Mace in hand.

Here
We are shunted from one cage
To another. Cuffed, uncuffed,
Cuffed again, uncuffed again.
The unseen, ungovernable element
The destruction represented
By our bodies controlled
At every moment.

My stream has not been
Comforting lately.
It's colder there, the cold
Of your freezer, which I know
Now is big, perhaps as big
As the cages into which
Abel Gideon and I are ushered.
I call them our social cages
Where I cast my line
For a shared story
Our common memory
Of you.

I can't really blame him
For refusing to take the bait.
I understand now
In a way I didn't the first time
I visited him here, how
Our smallest act of autonomy
Contains the whole of freedom.

I have my voice
The Story of Will Graham
And, handcuffed to a table
I promise it to Freddie
In exchange for an article.
A *Tattlecrime* valentine
To my admirer.

Hannibal:

I hear you, Will.
How could I not, when
You flash your feathers so?
When you and Chilton conspire
To keep me at bay?
I pay Abel Gideon a visit
A feigned first meeting
To gauge the tumult
Of your awakening mind.
To my pleasure he indicates
A sea change of another kind -
Soporific of apathy shaken
Purpose crystalline.
In secret you build your storm
Hot and cold, restless turning
Until, inevitably
The strike.

Will:

I'm waiting to be moved
From one cage to another
When my admirer responds, not
With the steady tread
Of Italian dress shoes, but
In the carefully neutral voice
Of my orderly.
His name is Matt.
He leans casually
Against the marble wall
Hands in his scrub pockets
Just as he has
Countless times before
And it reminds me
Of police station interviews -
Sitting across the table from a kid

A local tough months out of middle school
Who suddenly confesses
To mutilation
Rape
Torture
In the same tone he would use
To ask for a stick of gum.

I still in my cage, watching as
The invisible transmutation occurs
One mask yielding to
An identical face.
Matt, who brought
My breakfast tray this morning
Has disabled the surveillance equipment.
He tried to throw my trial
By murdering the bailiff
But denies murdering the judge
(Because *you* did that, didn't you.
The handwriting's a match)
He offers his hand in fellowship
And opens my cage.
I step out, for a moment
In the freedom of possibility.

When I bring my hands
Behind my back for him
To cuff me, I feel powerful
In my obedience
As though I am not being
Walked back to my cell
But leading the way.
As he cages and uncuffs me
My admirer demands a test
To prove his devotion to me
And I realize
I'm done waiting for you
To unveil your master plan
And I can live without
Understanding the truth of you.

I can't stop tasting
Abigail's ear in
My mouth, just like
I can't stop smelling
Georgia's burnt hair.

I can’t stop hearing
The scream of the saw
My hands remembering
The stone solidity of
Beverly’s body as I pushed
(As *you* pushed)
Her into it, and
That was part of your plan.

You knew
Jack would want me
To see her.
That I would be
Compelled
To see you.
To become you.
To become a killer.

That’s what you want.
What you’ve been waiting for.
I knew it, and resisted
Resisted you, even
Before I understood
You are relentless
And you will not stop
Until I, your pearled leviathan
Inevitably bite.

Proxy

Chapter Summary

The murder of Hannibal Lecter doesn't go as Will intended...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will:

I don’t talk about
The panic.
I don’t want to give them
A reason to sedate me
But tonight
It rises, worse
Than it ever has before
Until my heart pounds
And my body spasms
On each breath, until

I want to pace
Tear and smash
Everything in my cell
Everything in my body
Against the stones, until

I can’t think anymore
About you, how you
Might die tonight.

Hannibal:

The swimming club is private
All but abandoned at night
And as the tranquilizer begins to wear off
My first thought is that this
Might truly be the end.
Splayed, bound
Balanced on a bucket -
Hannibal Lecter, Eighth of The Name
Depicted As Christ In Swimwear

My intended is naked, save for his swimsuit
And my shirt, left unbuttoned.
As he sinks his blade
Making confident, clean lines
I recognize him. An orderly
From the Baltimore State Hospital
For the Criminally Insane.
With the delicate hauteur of the ordained
He proclaims himself your envoy.

Will:

I feel as though
I'm going to vomit, as though
I'm going to cry, as though
I'm going to laugh, as though
I'm going to breathe fire.

The panic
Is pain, is
Pleasure -
A constellation burning
In my back. Stars
Colliding, forming
Matter, a magnetic field
Contracting in confusion
Chaos at the emergence
Of a new pole.

Hannibal:

I have to admit I'm surprised.
Your proxy is well-chosen, Will.
I take it he received your valentine.
Did you evaluate him as I am now
Through your eyes?
Noting the breadth of his shoulders
The power in his frame
Setting him against me in your mind?
He gives me a choice
To die fast or slow.
Is this what you described to him?
I doubt it, but in his touch
Am I nevertheless meant
To feel yours?

Will:

Has it happened already
Or is he making it last?
I imagine unexpected accidents
On dark, abandoned roads
Eruptions of gunfire
Through unshaded windows
Limbs numb from hours
Of inventive torture.
Matt wants to prove himself to us.

Have I scared you?
Have you killed him?
Are you in pain?

The burning constellation
Expands, pushing between
My ribs, suffocating, and I fall
To the floor, to my knees
Tearing at my clothes
As the antlers break
Through my skin, hard
Branching, arching into the light
And blood begins to drip
From the faucet of my sink.

Hannibal:

He wants to devour me
Face flushed and breath quickening
At the thought as pain lifts me, breaks
Through every wall with the blunt insistence
Of a wrecking ball, and I struggle to breathe
Each finger dripping blood
My legs beginning to spasm
Too far gone to be surprised
When Jack and Alana appear.

The gunfire echoing within our blue-shimmering
Alcove turns two shots into a siege.
While the walls are still ringing
Your wounded beau arches against the tiles
Determined to finish me, and then
I am suspended, wings spread, unable
To fly, drowning

Will:

My sink overflows with blood

And I am left emptied
Telling myself
Your death
Has been my goal
Is my victory, regardless
Of means.
Telling myself I am
Satisfied, but

Hannibal:

As my lungs open
And the black wave recedes
Carrying our music
Unbearably unfinished, away
My first thought is that

Will:

This is not enough.

Chapter End Notes

So I had *a lot* of fun taking the erotic under/overtones in this sequence and really cranking them up XD

Composition

Chapter Summary

Hannibal wants to make sweet sweet art/music with Will and it's a whole thing.

Hannibal:

One should always think twice
Before gifting a profound experience to an artist -
A perennial harvest for restless hands
And a burning mind.
The warning has come too late for us, Will
A fact I realize after two days
Of skewering cubed hearts
While the stitches along my wrists
Pull and itch. Our music
Felt but unheard, wakes me
Driving away sleep with its demand
To be limbed and breathing, takes me
Back to you, to that night
Which might have been
The end. I bring our music
To harpsichord and theremin
Trying to hear its colors, to hold
The shape of it whole in my mind
Knowing these are not the instruments
Meant to give it life. Knowing
The composition will be incomplete
Until you play it with me. And yet
I can’t stop.
It’s been a long time, Will
Since my hands were set
Such work.

Will:

Plans must be redrawn
Now that I’ve shown my hand
And failed. I can’t say
Whether I’m disappointed
Or relieved that you survived.

That's a lie.
But also it's not.

The microscopes we move beneath
And the spotlights we move within
Are not so different, perhaps -
The control which must be
Maintained over me, and
The control which you must
Maintain over yourself.
We draw our battle lines
And summon our allies
Secretly in plain sight.

Hannibal:

Our music grows, fevered cells dividing
Forge-deep inside of me.
The theme of this movement is rejection
As self-preservation
Pushing away Will, the friend
Who has proven himself untrue.
Leaving him behind
In the prison of his own making
Breaking my vow
To stand by his side
In the darkness.

Will:

I wait in my social cage
Eyes closed, seeking the woods
Even though fresh air
Is a meal painfully digested now.
I imagine my dogs
So thoughtlessly free
Delirious with joy, turning
Drifts of leaves into golden confetti.
Another life
Looking in the mirror
And seeing only myself
But also
Maybe

Someone.
Please

No.
Not now.

I can't go on
If I think about that
Now.

My hands tighten around the bars
And the spiked branches
Of my antler tree spread
A burning black augury
Undaunted by my cage.
The bars must break
Or be swallowed, and
The tree shivers
Every spearpoint
Humming, attuned
To the echo
Of your footsteps.

And there you are -
Sleek-suited, unflappable
Ichthyic, flint-eyed.
The gentleman cage fighter
With a dancer's poise.

Hello, Dr. Lecter.

Hannibal:

It seems your thread has finally led you
Free of the labyrinth, Will.
May I ask what you found
At its center?

Will:

You.
It was always
Going to be you.

Hannibal:

Hence your attempt on my life?
I was more surprised
Than perhaps I should have been.
You did promise
You were going to make me feel
What, exactly?
You weren't specific.

Will:

Betrayed.
Powerless.

Hannibal:

Heartbroken?

Will:

If I thought you were capable of that, sure.

Hannibal:

It's only natural you should want a target.
An enemy upon which to pin all wrongs
Including your own
So that in defeating your enemy
You defeat an unwanted part of your Self.

I sought to help you, Will
Hoping you would come to trust me.
With regret, I am forced to conclude
This will not be possible
If you insist on denying my humanity.

Will:

I don't deny your humanity
Any more than you've denied mine.

Hannibal:

What if we did not
Deny each other anything
But presented ourselves openly?

Will:

Reciprocity is limited
From within a cage.

Hannibal:

Unfortunate, then
I cannot declare
Your innocence.

Will:

I agree.
That would be a stretch.

Hannibal:

My composition twists
In the sweet ache of genesis
Not to be forced
So I keep myself busy
Crafting a dinner party
Filling Jack's morgue
And petaling prosciutto roses
Waiting
For my notes to harmonize.

I continue to be fascinated
By the strength of your echo, Will.
Hostile
Absent
Yet present
In Chilton's stiff prey posture
The weariness behind Jack's smile
As he requests a plate
Of hors d'oeuvres to go.
You've been hard at work
Seeding their doubt in me
And I counter your move with alacrity
My ally well-placed and long-cultivated.

All art begins with the desire to communicate.
To understand one's medium, whether
Working with paint, pain, or pleasure.
Tonight my art is in flesh, in sleeplessness
A performance piece of the body.
It communicates my desire to Alana
My judgement to Abel Gideon
And your innocence to Jack Crawford.

There is a twinge of disappointment
In unchallenged victory -
Alana in my bed
Abel in my basement
Jack in my foyer, forced
To accept my alibi
And embark on the new mission
I have spun for him
To rescue Miriam Lass.
The threads of my composition

Fold into each other
With the divine craftsmanship
Of wings.

An artist working alone often grows tired
Of their own vision, methods, and limits.
Few things are more satisfying
Than encountering new talent.
You were right, Will.
The time for cages has passed.
I know what I can do
Now show me what you can do.

A Tree In Seven Pieces

Chapter Summary

> Will is finally released from the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane to discover that his life has been irrevocably transformed.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will:

I. There is water
At the bottom of the cistern.
Not much, but enough
To drown a man. Enough
To reflect me as I kneel
Looking down.

A half-collapsed shed in the woods
Near Somerville, Virginia
Its basement beautifully decorated
With the tackle of a killer's abattoir.
In my mind it melts away
As the dying flowers in their cloudy jars
Uncrumple like fresh-born butterfly wings.

Miriam Lass has been recalled to life.
Does she care to live?
She can't say.
Removed from time
Lost within herself
She dreamed of drowning
Her years lost to a faceless man -
The Ripper haloed in light.

II. Kneeling at the cistern
I travel within and find myself
In your office with its blood-
Red walls and chapel windows
Between which a tree grows
Backlit branches black thorns
Knots of clayed roots spreading

Across the carpet, and a man
Cradled
Consumed
Crucified.

This morning I walked free
The Story of Will Graham
Concluded to be null
And void, thanks
To the Ripper.
My old clothes unworn
For almost a year feel
Reliclike, ancestral
As though recovered from a grave.

Chilton stands, if not contrite
Then scared, which might be
Enough to save his life
Now that the Ripper has begun
To tie up loose ends.
He asks me why
I was spared, and
I have to smile.

I touch the bars of each cage
As one by one I leave them, ascending
Until I reach the marble hall
Where Jack waits with his olive branch -
Confession, doubt, and a crime scene
Near Somerville, Virginia.

III. The man in the tree
Who drowned in this cistern
Is Sheldon Isley
Baltimore City Councilman
Whose development deal
Destroyed a nesting habitat
For endangered songbirds.
And as I imagine standing in your office
Looking up at him
I can read the epitaph
Clearly in your graceful hand -

The dead man presented
In a wasteland of his own making
Crowned with a broken nest
Grafted onto the living tree.

In judgement forced to feed
That which he would destroy.

The trademarks of your theater
Are all accounted for -
Self-possession
Malevolence
Beauty
And I caution Jack to remember
The magician's hands distract
From the magician's purpose.

IV. As I enter the shadow
Of the tree, color sings
From within the torso split
Open, scraped clean, filled
A garden of deadly blooms -
Ragwort for liver, lungs opening
With lily-of-the-valley
Chains of white oleander
For intestines. A field harvested
And worked to feed new crops.

After the crime scene
I'm finally allowed to go home
And somehow it still feels like mine.
More than this, my dogs -
Dizzied by happiness
Standing on their hindlegs
Until I kneel in the mud
To receive a year's worth of kisses
And I must be real
I must still be me.
There must be a worthy part.
I bow my head
Humbled by their grace.

Alana stands apart from our reunion.
I don't have to meet her gaze
To feel my death in her heart
And taste its salted earth.
I know the flavor well -
It's been the inevitable end
Of all my romantic dealings.

She takes me to task
For my attempt on your life
In fear that I'm going to try again

And as we talk, I realize
I'm witnessing your gameplay -
The dark double vision
Of seeing through your eyes.
You needed an ally, and
You needed a hostage. Perhaps
You also needed to hurt me.
I can't blame you for that.

I see you
In the tight-leashed panic
Locking Miriam's shoulders
The hesitancy of each gesture
As though she, awake now
Is still surprised
By the world's unyielding
And merciless reality.
We talk about our shredded
Cheesecloth memories of the Ripper -
Strobing light and lost time
Needles and chamber music
Flowers. We understand
We have not been spared.

V. There's one last piece
To the transformation of Sheldon Isley
And I hold it in my hand. The heart -
Hard-packed clay heavy with seeds
To open a twilight of blue belladonna.
I wonder if Sheldon Isley
Stood before the scales
With no record of his life
Because you had turned his heart
Into kebabs. Featherweights
None of us.

Hannibal:

You, me
A kitchen and a gun.
Once again, we find ourselves
In liminality.

Will:

Hopefully without
Interruption this time.
I still need to make you hurt.

Hannibal:

Would hurting me
Satisfy you?

You've already hurt me
As the scars on my wrists attest
And clearly that was not enough.
I think what you need
Is to kill me
And I think you've known this
For a long time.
But have you given any thought
To the other question I asked you
That morning in Abigail's kitchen?

Who do you become
If you kill me?

Will:

I get it.
I become you.
And that's what you want.
Because if I'm like you
If everyone's like you
Then you're not guilty.

He is silent
Backlit by the ice light
Of the open refrigerator
Which casts his face in shadow
And creates a finely-cut person shape.
I keep my gun pointed at its head
Hands steady in the dark kitchen
Where I have been waiting for him.

Hannibal:

Your actions and your theory
Seem to contradict each other, Will.
If your goal is to prove me wrong
You won't kill me now.

Will:

And if my goal is to prove you right
You have about a minute
To congratulate yourself.

Hannibal:

You and I both know
You're better than this.
More intelligent, more creative
And more curious.

Guilty or innocent
If you kill me now
Our story is over.
Are you ready for that?

Will:

I step forward
Forcing him to flinch
Turn his face away
Eyes closed in a feint of surrender
Waiting for me.
I think about the bullet
Which is both a promise
And a lie -
The End.

I don't need Hannibal
Or the bullet
To tell me how this ends.
Whether it's now
Next month
Or in ten years
It will end in blood.
It will end between our teeth.
It will end at an altar
Where a broken heart
Is the only acceptable sacrifice.

I lower my gun
Walk away
And our story goes on.

VI. The new heart of Sheldon Isley
Dripping water black with silt
Thumps in my hand
Like a weighted clock.
His face is turned away just so
As though he sleeps.
I imagine him opening his eyes
Looking over the lengths of himself
At what is and is not his body

What will never be his again
As he thinks -
I had a dream like this once.

Chilton is at my door
The smell of his bloody clothes
Making the dogs whine.
He's the Ripper now
And as I watch him pace
Crackling with panic
I can't deny I'm impressed
By your audacity.
Like a figure skater
Executing an impossible jump -
A thing of effortless grace
And suicidal recklessness
Underpinned by a lifetime
Of rigorously honed skill.
I sit in my empty dining room
Which was stripped a year ago
For evidence, and I know
You'll stick this landing.

Chilton runs when Jack arrives
And I stand on my front porch
Listening as echoes of the hunt
Drift out from the snowy woods
Remembering another me
Who sat barefoot on these steps
Sick, cold, and terrified
Needing you.
The dogs press warm
Against my legs, and
A gunshot claps tree to tree
Scattering birds. A second shot
To surrender.

They emerge
Ungainly in the deep snow
Jack grim but confident, ignoring me
Chilton awake now, understanding
His life is no longer his own.
The Story of Frederick Chilton -
Mad Doctor
Egomaniac
Puppet Master
Et cetera.

Simultaneously exposed
And rendered invisible.

VII. The rib cage cracked, waits
And the heart in my hand
Grows impatient. After all
This is what it was made for.
Hands wet, fingernails dirty
I reach up and place the new heart
In the dead man's chest
Where it beats, seeds thrumming
Awakening blood dark as syrup
To trace his cold skin.
The spark makes no sound
But I still feel as though
I can hear it, finally set free
And racing to open every flower.

For the first time in years
I pay someone to cut my hair.
I scrub my nails until they're raw
And present myself at your door
Right on time.

What are you listening to?

Hannibal:

Vaughan Williams
The Lark Ascending.
I had a feeling you would come tonight.

Will:

And you've kept my appointment
Open all this time. Why?
What do you do here by yourself?

Hannibal:

I draw.
Have you come to kill me, Will?

Will:

No.
Sorry to disappoint.

He smiles, stands aside to let me in
And I look for mud on the carpet
Before I remember the tree
Never grew here.
His office is dimly-lit, womblike
A fire set against the night
Our chairs expectant.

I came to say
You were right.
I'm not ready
For our story to be over.
And I can't pretend
That my life
That I
Will ever be the same.

Hannibal:

You've been recalled to life
From a deep shadow.
How will you move forward?

Will:

I was hoping
You might help me.

Chapter End Notes

This one was a devil to write and I'm still really proud of it <3 There are so many scenes in this show that absolutely overwhelm me when I start to think about how I'm going to adapt them for this story, and the scene where Will has Hannibal at gunpoint was the big one for this episode. Will's reply to Hannibal's question ("Who do you become if you kill me?") came so hard out of left field that I almost changed it, because I was completely at a loss as to how Hannibal might reply/how the scene could continue. I was also really excited to use the idea of "the end of our story" as an opportunity to foreshadow the actual end of the story. I try to keep coming back to these archetypal figures of Hunter, Prey, Prophet, Magician, which Will and Hannibal take turns inhabiting. Will predominantly functions as the Prophet, so I had to give him that moment of foresight. Also *The Lark* (aka Will) *Ascending*!

A Good Fisherman

Chapter Summary

Talking about beauty, talking about fish.

Will:

If Jack asks, I'll tell him
It was necessary for us to be here
In the coldest hour before dawn
Cutting a hole in the thick slick ice
Watching him fumble to bait a hook
And hunch, shivering, in layers of wool
As the world sleeps around us.
It might have been necessary, but
There might also be a part of me
Enjoying his penitence.

We sit on battered plastic coolers
With thermoses of bad coffee
And discuss how we're going to wake
Unhungry, sleeping fish.
I picture them nestled together
Along the sludgy lake bottom
Beneath their dark water blankets
And try to imagine what I would want
What would stir me from safety
If I were a fish.

Three trout are hooked thrashing
Wide mouths spilling
Water thick with leafmeal
Each lateral line
An iridescent plum-colored horizon.
I stun them as quickly as I can
Hoping their small deadened brains
Will keep fear from souring the meat
And tuck them into beds
Of clean white ice.

It's not lost on me
That you transform everything you touch

So I shouldn't be surprised
When the trout are brought to your table
Cooked blue and ouroboros-knotted
In a garden overflowing with watercress
And coiled octopus tentacles.
A submarine Eden.
I shouldn't be surprised
That your clothes
From shoes to watch
To pocket square
Somehow compliment the food.
But I am.
It's all so unnecessary
And yet

Hannibal:

Beauty is never necessary, Will
But life would ring rather hollow without it.
Suffering would only ever be suffering
And death ever only death.
In willing beauty to life
Perhaps we are seeking
The means to survive it.

Will:

I knew you would say
Something like that.

Hannibal:

Of course you did.
It hearkens to the idea of balance
A truth which we all perceive
Even if we lack the means to express it -
That every action has
Requires
Compels
An equal and opposite reaction.

Will:

If balance is the reason
And the rule, I can't help
Thinking about what sits
On the other side of the scale
As I look at your home
Your dining room

Your table
You.

It makes me feel
The edge of an unseen pit
In the very center of you
And how good you are
At hiding it.

Chrysalis

Chapter Summary

A bird inside a woman inside a horse, and everything born after.

Hannibal:

The air of the stables is thick
With the musk of horse and hay
A smell which permeates like incense
Each stall a horseflesh-warmed confessional.
All except this one
Where the air has gone cold
And the sweet sour tang of entrails
Has soaked into the bedding.
Where the mare lies hollowed and stiff
Head turned away from the dead woman
Pulled from her exhausted womb.

My first thought is one of martyrdom -
The unjustly murdered woman
Resurrected from the belly of the beast
A miracle preluding canonization.
But this is no tableau vivant
No disciplined artist's exercise.
The killer's spellwork is disjointed
Primitive and pagan, childlike
In its conviction.

Will:

Whoever folded Sarah Craber
Into the horse was praying
For rebirth, and for a moment
As she lies on the autopsy table
The prayer is answered.
There is a beat of life
From within the shell
And the woman born from a broken horse
Breaks to release a bird -
A starling scattering blood in flight
Jet eyes blinking at the new world.

Whoever coaxed the bird
Into Sarah Craber was grieving
Their actions born of a deep
Helpless suffering, desperate
For the power to make things right.
As soon as Jack and I
Meet Peter Bernardone
A familiar weight settles over me.

The drafty shed
Which might also be his home
Is towered with cages
Full of animals
And when we show him
The picture of Sarah
He worries about the bird.

Peter Bernardone
Reclusive and fearful
Marked by violence
Out of tempo with society
In a way which makes others
Aware of the music and wary
Of that which disrupts it.

Peter Bernardone
One life among so many
Taking root where it can
Growing quietly so as to go
Unnoticed by disaster.
The obvious suspect
Or the perfect victim.

Hannibal:

What, in your opinion
Makes a perfect victim?

Will:

Lack of power.
Abundance of need.
But you would know
More about that than me.

Hannibal:

You maintain that you wish
To resume your therapy

While still unwilling to relinquish
The thread of my guilt?

Will:

We don't have to do this.
Talk through veils.
I'm pretty sure Chilton
Hasn't bugged your office.

It was your idea, after all
That we should present ourselves
Openly, denying nothing.

Hannibal:

Do you still dream
Of killing me, Will?

Will:

Yes.

Hannibal:

What's stopping you?
What stopped you that night
When I found you in my home
Waiting for me?

Will:

Let's call it
Curiosity.

Hannibal:

There's a smile in his eyes
Not coy so much as playful
And I see it again, his vein of savagery.
Quartz clear woven
Sapphire from the riverbed
Music to my ears.

Will:

Jack and his team find fifteen
More dead women and I bring
The miraculous starling
To Peter. It seems

To comfort him
And I don't want to talk
About murder and mass graves.

I want to be like this bird -
Present
Functional
Self-contained
Anonymous
Content
Fleeting

This thought
Makes me so sad.
It feels ungrateful
To want to be a bird
A horse
A fish
A dog
Rather than a human.
The waste of an incredible gift, or
Escape from an unbearable burden.

I know Peter's not guilty.
Why can't that be enough?
I question him gently
And he mourns Sarah, confesses
He wanted to make
Something beautiful
Of her death, and inevitably
My mind is full of Hannibal.

Specifically
The first time I saw him.
His handwriting, that is
His art
In the death of Cassie Boyle
And I touched his mind -
A friend's clothing
Worn by a stranger.
A known landscape strange
By moonlight.

He can make beauty
Like spinning gold from air
But I've never seen him grieve
The way Garret Jacob Hobbs did
The way Peter does -

Stinging tears, face turned away
Hands twisting between his knees
Light catching the ridge of scar tissue
Across the side of his head
Which separates past
From present and future
And it hurts.
It always hurts
To see the arc of a life.

I knew Peter
The moment I saw him
And it occurs to me now
I know the secret crouching
Claw-deep in his throat.
I make him a promise of justice
(Somehow
I still believe what I'm saying)
And he gives me a name.

Hannibal:

Clark Ingram
Peter Bernardone's social worker
Is a man made of edges
Delineated components
Tidy as a paper doll.
The kind of man who digs his graves
In a perfect circle.

We watch his interview
And Will bristles at my side
Reliable as jack-plucked string -
Empathy, anger, righteousness
The opening triplet of his theme
My guilt its *dal segno* repeat
Stricken from the score
At the drop of Jack's hand.

Where there is no direct evidence
Clark Ingram walks free
And Will turns away from us
Head heavy with the unspoken folly
Of bureaucracy. Its unwinnable war
Against the antediluvian cruelty
Of the human animal, unquenched.

Night falls early with the snow
And Will is still sparking, silent
As we drive to the stables.
Signals are stretched thin here
And a choir sings Fauré through static -

In Paradisum deducant te Angeli
In tuo adventu suscipiant te martyres
Et perducant te in civitatem sanctam Jerusalem.

I can't help but glance at Will
In the clandestine semi-darkness -
Weariness burring fine edges
Nails bit to the quick.
Without glasses his eyes look younger
Just woken.

If you were my victim
What was your abundant need?

Will:

It's been a long day, Hannibal.

Hannibal:

Do you believe a similar need
Compelled Peter to keep Mr. Ingram's secret
For as long as he did?

Will:

Maybe.

Hannibal:

You told me once
You needed me to know
Who you are.

Will:

At the time
I thought I did.

Hannibal:

And now?

Will:

I don’t think the Ripper cleared my name
To tell me about myself.
I think he did it
So he could listen.

Hannibal:

What will he hear?

Will:

A work in progress.

Hannibal:

When we enter the stables
The scent of blood is still warm
And the horses’ eyes have been covered.
Peter kneels beside a mass of wine-dark offal
Cooling in the winter air, his head bowed
Over a dead mare, bloody hands performing
A familiar devotion of needle and thread.

When Will asks him
Whether Mr. Ingram is inside the horse
Peter calmly answers
Yes.

Will:

The cages filling Peter’s home
Are smashed empty and silent
And the tracks of his escaped animals
Make frantic rivers through the snow.

Feathers and hay
Gum the soles of our shoes
As snow falls through cracks in the roof
Onto the mattress where Peter sleeps.

The man he trusted
To guide and protect him pointed
To the mare’s crushed skull
With a dripping sledgehammer
And called Peter guilty.

I grieve for gentle things
Broken senselessly
And I hate myself

For not keeping my promise.
For letting Clark Ingram
Continue to hurt Peter.

Of course
What I mean to say
Is that I hate myself
For needing Hannibal.
For still needing Hannibal
To know me.

Peter tells me
He hates Clark Ingram.
That Clark Ingram deserves to die
And more than anything
I wish I had his courage.
The strength to forsake.

Hannibal:

At the far end of the stable
The dead horse twitches
And I watch, reverent
As the distended belly ripples
Stitches straining
Against the soon to be reborn.
There should be music
A sour requiem
Unspooled in reverse
As Clark Ingram splits his cocoon
But there is only snow silence.

He shakes in the cold, gasping for air
And does not hear the last sigh
Of the mare's body sinking.
He looks up through eyelashes
Wet with his mother's blood
At me, at the gun in Will's hand
And casts about for a weapon
While still on his knees.

Will:

Do it.
Pick up the hammer.
Give me a reason.

Hannibal:

Will -

Will:

I know he's guilty.
Why can't that be enough?

Hannibal:

You already know the answer.
You're driven by a child's ache
For a world of simple justice
In which cruelty is punished
And victims find peace.
But that world
Has never been impossible.

You don't need him
To pick up the hammer.

Will:

Hannibal's voice is calm
And he waits
Has been waiting
For me.
To unburden.
To become. Stretch
To the surface
Where I can breathe.
To the shore
Where I can walk.
Where I can kill
Clark Ingram.

But at the last second
Hannibal stops my hand
Swift and gentle
Like catching a butterfly.

Hannibal:

Will shivers but says nothing
As I ease the gun from his fingers.
After thirty-seven years, a lifetime
Of gestation and labor
There should be music
At his crowning.
The blindfolded horses shift in their stalls

And Clark Ingram lowers his head
Still choking on blood and air
As the snow falls.

I put my hand
On the back of Will's neck
And draw him close
Because he looks cold.

Lure

Chapter Summary

Hannibal makes a move and Will gets an idea.

Will:

We make it back to Wolf Trap
In the coldest hour before dawn
When the forest still carries night in its mouth
Sentinel trees emerging in their tireless rows.
All through the endless night I've felt
The phantom weight of the gun in my hand
Unfired bullets like an unfinished song
Stuck in my head.

I don't realize we've arrived
At my house until
You put the car in park. Until
You turn to look at me, and
There's a bell sounding
In the core of me, carrying
Warning like fire through every nerve.
Warning
Since the first moment I saw you.

With that same deceptive ease
You say you'll see me soon.

When I don't respond
You take my heavy hand
In both of yours
And press a kiss
To the back of it
Like a priest
Granting dispensation.

I have just enough time
To think that your lips
Are soft as mushroom gills
Before you lift your head
Letting me go

And I hear myself
Say goodbye.

I stand on the porch
And watch your car retreat
Down the rutted muddy drive
A small wave of dog spilling out of my house
As soon as I open the front door.
Most of them gallop away into the snow
But Winston lingers, circling me
Restless and seeking
Until I bend down to touch him
And say his name.

I move slowly, carefully
Within the house, until
It remembers me.
I take off my coat
Turn on lights
Clean around the dog bowls
But my mind is still in the car.
My mind is still in my hand.
In your hand.
In your lips
On the back of my hand.

I find myself at the sink
Water running
Sleeves rolled back
Ready to wash
Hesitating.
I raise my hand
And press my lips
To the back of it.

The sun begins to break
Above the treeline, and I know
How I'm going to catch you.

You're not Clark Ingram
Just like I'm not Peter Bernardone.
There's a different flavor to our violence -
To the warring point which refuses
To puncture, and maybe
It's as simple as balance.

Suffering calls for beauty
As death calls for life.

Ice for fire
Storms for sun
Salt for sweet
And teeth for tongue.

Teeth

Chapter Summary

I'm so bad at these summaries. It's season 2, episode 9. We're talking about human vs. animal nature, society, anger, and THIRST ;)

Will:

Even in my dreams it's winter
Colors drunk like water from the world
Leaving an icy crust across a field of snow
And a riot of birds, unseen
In burnt-black trees.
The stag is harnessed at my side
Head lowered, antlers apocalyptic
Steaming like a locomotive
With each release of his powerful lungs.
At my command he steps forward
Tightening the rope which binds
Hannibal, throat to ankle
To a birch tree.

> *I applaud your attention to detail, Will.*
> *You've clearly given this a lot of thought.*

So have you.

The rope wrapped around his neck
Forces his head back
And he watches me, placid
Through half-lidded eyes.
The birds
Are getting louder
Or coming closer.

> *Perhaps.*
> *It's quite a gamble to make*
> *On an assumption, though*
> *Isn't it?*

You kissed me.

I am aware.
And you do interpret evidence for a living.
What is it telling you now?

You want me.

He shifts within the ropes
Not in discomfort, but as though
He's settling himself into bed.
There must be ten thousand birds
In these trees, making the air
An insect scream
The forest of Babel
And I have to move closer
To the tree
To hear his reply.

Perhaps.
It remains to be seen. However
The evidence of my unconscious
Is not what's currently on display.
This is, as one might say
Your stage.

I whistle again
And the stag drives his hooves
Into the snow like spears.
I'm close enough to hear
The exhalation
As Hannibal's lips part
And the rope tightens.

The evidence says
I want to kill you.

He smiles at me
Mouth stretching blue.

Does it?

Hannibal:

You know this only works
If you're honest with me
And with yourself.

Will:

There's no threat
In the way he says this, and yet
I feel myself tense for flight.
It's all I can do to sit still
Beneath his gaze
As logs split and crumble
In the fireplace. Listening
To the petulant wind of caged flames.

It's all I can do to not
Think about the kiss
Imprinted like a burn
On the back of my hand.

I would have killed Clark Ingram
If you hadn't stopped me.

Hannibal:

How do you feel about that?

Will:

Like I'm aware of something
I took for granted.
You don't think about breathing
Until you can't.
You don't think about blinking
Until something's in your eye.

I didn't think about restraint.
It was just a reflex -
To gentle, refrain
To breathe deep and try again.
To loosen my grip
Lower my voice.

Hannibal:

And what do you think about now?

Will:

I want to bite
And never soften my jaw.
I want to sink my teeth
And finally
Finally
Quiet.

Hannibal:

Will's departure from my office
Is accompanied by Margot Verger's arrival
And in many ways I feel
As though one piece of music
Has simply been carried over
To an allied instrument.

Margot, too, is struggling
To unlearn restraint
Relearn power
And like Will, contemplates
What violence will make of her.
Savagery, however
Is not the igniting spark.
It is the explosion.
What they fear becoming
They are already, by nature -
Children of wrath.

Will:

The victim's blood has frozen
Into ruby icicles like rock candy
Which drip from his body
Torn open in the sunshine
By tooth and claw.
Someone has a pet.

When I go to visit Peter
On the closed psych ward
He has a small brown mouse
Hidden in his jumpsuit
The fragile hummingbird-hearted animal
Nestled warm against his ribs.

I can't help but wonder
Whether the mouse trusts Peter
Or simply needs him.
If trust is born of need
Is there really a difference?

Peter cautions me
To not blame the animals
For their violence. Blame
The human who holds the leash
Or the whip.

On a vast unbroken plain of snow
Beneath a cloud-swallowed noonday sun
The blood brightens, unfreezing
And lifts, swept into the air like petals.
Day falls back into night as the remains
Of a bonfire begin to smoke, then
Unfurl banners of pale gold flame
Proclaiming dominion
In the wilderness.

A young couple enters
The circle of light, which glints
Off of satin, pearl, and gems.
The raiment beneath their winter coats.
My pet and I watch, hidden
From the trees as the monarchs embrace.
At my command he charges forward
(*I* charge forward)
Driving his antlers
(*My* antlers)
A many-bladed scythe through wheat
And the blood filling his mouth
(*My* mouth)
Is rich and warm as soup.

Hannibal:

You believe a man
Is committing these attacks
Not an animal?

Will:

A man who wants
To be an animal.
Indiscriminate.
Free.

Hannibal:

Powerful.

Will:

And simultaneously blameless.

Hannibal:

Unbound by the conditioning
Of human society.

Will:

I think about the bonfire
Which sang itself into the sky last night
Drawing the killer to his prey. How
Fire is a state
Of eternal eating.

I don't realize I'm leaning
Against Hannibal's desk until
He comes to join me. Until
I feel the wood strain
Beneath his body.

Hannibal:

I wonder whether he finds animals
More honest in their killing.
As humanity evolves
We distance ourselves
From the impulse of brutality
Using machines
Science
Politics
War
And call it civilization
While our goal remains the same.

Will:

Power.

Hannibal:

Each time you've tried to kill me
You've held yourself at a distance
From the act itself.
Perhaps the reason I'm still alive
Is that your methods have not satisfied
The original impulse.
Perhaps you feel
They are dishonest.

Will:

I didn't start meeting with you
Because I wanted an excuse
To be violent.
I kept coming
Because I needed a friend.

Hannibal:

Until I provoked you.

Will:

That night I came to your house
After I was released from the hospital
Did you leave the patio door unlocked
On purpose for me?

Hannibal:

Yes.

Will:

Why?

Hannibal:

Let's call it
Curiosity.

Will:

Doubtless curiosity
Is what compels Hannibal
To tell Jack
About one of his former patients -
Randall Tier
Who believed himself to be
An animal born
In the body of a man.

Curiosity
Because Hannibal knew
Jack would bring me
To question Randall
And wanted to see
What would happen.

We meet him
At the Museum of Natural History

In a room full of ancient skeletons
Its walls a lawless jungle of shadows.
Randall Tier is a young man
With tired, worldworn eyes
And looking at him now
I can picture the boy he was
When he was
Brought to you.
When he speaks
I can hear the council you gave him
In preparation for this meeting.

He tells us about his recovery.
His reintegration into society
As a functioning adult.
He delivers his lines well
With just the right combination
Of resentment and conviction.
Grudging cooperation.
Defiant dignity.
I think you would be proud.
It's not easy to imagine Randall Tier -
Pressed work clothes
Fresh haircut
Museum staff badge
Tearing people apart.

Before tonight
It wouldn't have been easy
To imagine Margot Verger
Showing up at my house
Unannounced after dark
But clearly
I need to adjust my standards
Of normalcy. It turns out
She and I have been scouting each other
Covertly from a distance
Ever since our chance encounter
Outside your office.
She asks for whiskey.

Her presence in my house
Is incongruous, exotic
As though she were a peacock
Or a jeweled white tiger.
Something moneyed, lovely
And captive, with all the muzzled anger
Of captive things.

Thoroughly indifferent
To the state of her surroundings
She sits across from me
And we talk about carnage.

She tells me
About her family's meatpacking empire.
Rivers of flesh run
Through churning slaughterhouses.

She tells me
About her twin brother
The coddled heir.
Her abuser from the womb.

I see you, Hannibal
Listening to her story
Not one line of your face betraying
A voyeurism so cultivated
It's mistaken for respect.

She's your type
Just as I am.
Just as Randall Tier was.

I think about Dr. Du Maurier
The first person to believe me.
Was she one of your pupils, too?
It's impossible to imagine you
Earnestly seeking therapy
Admitting need. However

I've seen the cracks in your mask
Felt the edge of the pit in your heart
And I approach with care.

Hannibal:

What is it
You would like to know?

Will:

Why do you want us
To kill?

Hannibal:

I want my patients
To see the truth of themselves.
I want to help them
Accept that truth.

Will:

So we can be free?

Hannibal:

Yes.
In whatever way
Is most therapeutic for you.

Will:

Even if that freedom
Puts us at odds
With the world we live in?

A person will never be granted
The same liberties
As an animal.
Only the same restraints.

Hannibal:

A fundamental condition
Of personhood in our society.
Born on the presupposition
That we are set above
All other living things.

Will:

You disagree?

Hannibal:

Whether mankind was created
In God's image, or God perpetually
Created and recreated
By man in ours
The mirror between remains.

Will:

As above
So below.

Hannibal:

Whether we are restrained
Or at liberty
Freedom within
Is still freedom.

Will:

Says the man at liberty.
I wonder if Randall Tier
Would feel the same way.

Hannibal:

Perhaps
You should ask him.

Fight

Chapter Summary

Winston and the other dogs don't know how to help when a stranger attacks Will.

Threat beyond the door.
Danger in the night.
We smell
And we claw
To protect
Or to run.
Will tries
To push us back
But when he opens
The door
One of the others
Is free
Running
Into the trees.
From within our shelter
We watch Will.
We listen
To his good voice
Calling for Buster
As we call for Will.
When he comes inside
We can smell
His fear.
He feels danger
But Buster is
Lost.
Will takes
Gun
And leaves us
To follow
Buster’s tracks
In the snow.
From within our shelter
We hear Buster
Calling for Will
And we challenge

The threat
Even though
We are not
Free.
We watch Will
Leave the trees
Running
Carrying Buster
And we watch
The darkness
Follow their tracks
In the snow.
Within our shelter
Will gives
Buster to us
To clean
Warm and hide.
Will makes our shelter
Dark
In the snow light
And waits
With gun.
So we wait
With him.
He is afraid
As we are afraid
But he challenges
The danger coming
So we too
Challenge.
The other
Who threatens
Breaks
Claws
Into our shelter.
The other is
Living
Not-Living.
A person
Carried within
Bones
Heavy and sharp.
Will's gun
Is fast fire
Shattering rock
But the other
Challenges.
They fall fighting

And we dance
Around them
Waiting
For Will
To call us
To join him.
We are ready.
His threat
Is ours.
His challenge
Is ours.
His shelter
Is ours.
He is
Ours
We are
His.
But Will
Does not call us.
He breaks
His quiet hands
Breaking
Through the shell
Of bones
Until the other
Is belly up
Beneath him
On the floor.
The other
Quiets
Does not fight.
The challenge
Is over
So we do not
Challenge.
Will has won
But continues
To wound
And we feel
His hunger
Warm the air
Like blood
Like fucking
Like killing
Like birth.
We watch
And we wait.
Death

Is a cold thing.
A slipping away.
We hear it
Breaking within
The other’s neck.
We see it
In his stillness.
We smell it
In his last flight
Of blood.
Will quiets
But does not rise.
He does not
Look to us.
His broken hands
Bleed onto the floor.
He is still
Within his hunger
And we wait
For him
To come back.

Apprentice

Chapter Summary

> My headcanon for what might have happened after Will brings Randall Tier's body to Hannibal's house.

Will:

The patio door is unlocked
When I arrive at Hannibal’s house.
This feels more intimate
Than it should.
Without his exoskeleton
Randall Tier is easy to carry
But he looks too young
Vulnerable.

As I lay him out
On the dining room table
I fight the urge to look away from him
In secondhand shame as though
He’s stood up in class
Not realizing his fly’s down
And doesn’t understand
Why people are laughing.

Hannibal’s not
Surprised to see us
When he comes home
And I realize
Of course
He’s driven here
From Wolf Trap.

I imagine him watching
From the trees
As my window broke
As the blows landed
As I put Randall Tier
In the trunk of my car.

I almost ask
Which of us he wanted
Dead. I think
He would say Randall, but
There's a good chance
It wouldn't have mattered to him
One way or another.
I don't ask.

Hannibal takes one look at my hands
And instructs me to remove my coat
While he fetches a first aid kit
And a bowl of water.
We sit at the table, Randall Tier
An obtrusively large centerpiece
And Hannibal cares for me.
He checks for broken bones
Presses my hands down
Into the warm, salted water
Treats my lacerated knuckles
With iodine, and wraps them gently
In lengths of white gauze.
When he's done
He holds my hands
In both of his
As though we're praying
Then bends his head
To kiss my aching fingers.

It wouldn't be enough
To be a bird
A horse
A fish
Or a dog.
I want
To be stone.

Hannibal suggests
We bring Randall
Down to the basement.

When I imagined this moment
I was worried he would be jovial.
Aristocratically feverish.
I was bracing myself for music -
A bright delirious waltz
From a record player in the corner.
But it's quiet down here

As though we've been swallowed.
Hannibal is calm
Efficient
Attentive.

We lay Randall Tier
On a wide, sturdy table.
There are knives, saws
Surgical gloves
And plastic curtains
Which enclose us like a tent
Or a canopy bed.
The tiled floor slopes discreetly to a drain.
Hannibal rolls his sleeves back
To the elbows, and I remember
The surgeon I saw once
In the back of an ambulance.
I strip down to my white undershirt
And pocket my watch.

It's quiet down here
And maybe a waltz would have been better
Than the sound as Hannibal and I bear down
On a double-handed blade
To decapitate Randall Tier.
Hannibal shows me
How to cut carefully
Through skin, muscle, ligament, tendon
And I imagine a waltz over the
Slick smooth hard scraping *pop*
As Hannibal twists
Randall's shoulder
From its socket.

In a way
It's not that different
From breaking down a chicken.
Except that it is.

My hands are shaking
But Hannibal doesn't call attention to it
And I can see now
How I tumbled so fast
From annoyance
To mistrust
To liking
To need.

I imagine myself
Hannibal's perfect apprentice
And it gets easier. Eventually
Randall Tier becomes
Meat.
Hannibal shows me how
To clean and vacuum seal
The cuts
And I stack them in his freezer
Which is, indeed, big.

But Hannibal also teaches me
Detachment is not the point of this.
Detachment, in fact, appears
To be the cardinal sin here.
He braces his hands against the table
Expression thoughtful
And prompts me to consider Randall Tier -
His brief, ill-fitting life
His gladiatorial death
And asks how I intend
To honor him.

Le Sacre Du Printemps

Chapter Summary

Season 2, episode 10, structured around Stravinksy's *The Rite of Spring*

CW: childhood sexual abuse, animal cruelty

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

I. Les Augures Printaniers

Randall:

It's not what I dreamed, but
This is your first time.
I can't expect perfection.

Will:

What was it
You dreamed?

Randall:

Real teeth, grown
From my own mouth.
Claws curved and white
As crescent moons.
Lengths of corded muscle
Fur the color of blooded copper.
A den in the heart of a mountain
Hot with the bodies of my pack.

Will:

I'm sorry
I couldn't give you that.
It's been a long night
And an even longer day.
I haven't slept.

Randall:

I don’t need your apologies
Or excuses, but tell me
How does it feel to remember
Rather than imagine?
To leave the charnel house of your mind
The only place where you could
Bloody your Self and wake clean?

Will:

Not that different
To be honest.

Randall:

Is that what you’ll say
When you eat me?

Will:

I imagine so.

Randall:

Tastes like chicken.

Will:

Pork
More likely.

Randall:

You could have just dumped my body
In a river somewhere
And been done with it.

Will:

No I couldn’t.

Randall:

Because you’re trying
To fuck a serial killer?

Will:

Because I'm trying
To *capture* a serial killer.

Randall:

Whatever you need
To tell yourself.

Will:

What did Hannibal tell you
When he brought you
To my house?

Randall:

Maybe you'll find out one day
When he's had his fill of you.

Will:

I intend to win
Before that happens.

Randall Tier looks at me
(He doesn't look at me.
He will never *look* again.
His eyes were glued in place
After I slipped his face
Onto the sabertooth's skull.)
And I am aware of
This moment outside my mind -
The Museum of Natural History
The forensics team
Jack
Hannibal
Waiting for me.

Randall:

Just remember that
Even if you succeed
You'll be left staring
Into the eyes of your quarry
Feeling as though
It is your Self
In the cage.

II. Jeux des Cités Rivales

Margot:

It's not that I love my brother
Too much to kill him.
At least I hope
That's not what it is.

I'm not sure there's a word
For how I feel about Mason.
My body formed around his.
In knowing him
I knew that I *was*.

We were five the first time
Mason asked me to touch him.
He said he would
Give me chocolate.
The thought of saying no
Didn't occur to me, and wouldn't
For almost three years.

Love isn't the word
But neither is hate.
Ownership
Comes closer. It has
That knife's edge feeling -
This will cut.

Mason knew I liked girls before I did
And seemed surprised
By our parents' shock
By my shame
When he mentioned it offhand
During dinner. *I thought*
Everyone knew.

My name soured like bad milk
On our father's tongue after that
And no amount of therapy
Or corrective summer camps
Could make me fresh again.

We were twenty
When Mason apologized.
When he knew Father's will

And my absence from it
Had been finalized.

I tell Dr. Lecter
It's not that I love my brother
Too much to kill him.
It's that without him
Without a male Verger heir
I would be destitute.
A deviant without so much
As a finishing school certificate
To my name.

What I don't tell Dr. Lecter
Is that without my brother
I don't know what would be left
Of me.

Yesterday Mason brought me
Into one of the barns
Where he's had a maze built
For his pigs. Specially bred -
Dark hide rough and shaggy
As tree bark, broad
Heavy bodies, tusks
Long as my hand.

A dummy made of feed sacks
Stuffed with dripping meat
Wearing my clothes, was lowered
Into the center of the maze
And I felt the ground shake
When the pigs stampeded
To tear my effigy apart.

A massive gilt-framed mirror
Has been placed just so
Above the pit, the way
Some men will put mirrors
Above their beds.

Possession
Is another cutting word.

Dr. Lecter encourages me
To turn these words in my mind -
Ownership can be transferred.
Possession can be broken.

There are many different kinds
Of power.

III. Danse de La Terre

Hannibal:

Delicacy is key.
The instrument should feel
Like an extension of your own body.
Its music, your own voice.
Never an object
Bent to your will.

Will:

As Margot makes her move -
Takes the whiskey from my hand
Begins to unbutton my shirt
I wonder why we do this.
Why people are compelled
To touch each other.
To lay themselves bare
And compare scars.

Hannibal:

Sometimes it happens
My hands become
Aware of each other
Or my worn out face
Seeks shelter in them.
Then I feel a slight sensation.
But who would dare
To exist just for that?

Will:

I don’t care why she’s here.
I don’t care why she wants me.
She’s beautiful
Warm
She smells like burnt sugar
And sage. I suppose
This is why we do it.

Why we pretend pain
Can be kissed better.

Hannibal:

A sentimental notion
But also a comforting one.
The human animal is at once
Infinitely complex and very simple -
The opportunistic omnivore.
Delicacy is key.
Alana doesn't protest
When I pull her down
By her throat
As long as I do it
Gently.

Will:

I try not to think about that.
Every time I do
All I can see
Is the Other
Crouched before the hearth
Star white eyes staring
Still as a cat ready to spring
Its sex straining, heavy
Obscene. Antlers
Buried in Alana's hair.

Hannibal:

Sweat and skin
Blood-swollen tissue
Secreting glands.
The most practical functions of anatomy
Imbued with our very souls.
We listen to the notes
Of this music we make
So we don't have to hear
The silence between them.

Will:

When it's over
I pretend to sleep
Giving Margot privacy
To dress and leave
Under cover of night.

I stay awake
Feeling the bed go cold.

IV. Glorification de L'Élue

Hannibal:

Mason Verger is a prime specimen -
The bored and sadistic princeling
But it would be rude
To refuse his peace offering, and
I'm disinclined to turn down
Good meat.

Unequipped as he is
To appreciate devotion and sacrifice
Mason Verger is undeserving
Of this pig. I deliver it
Soft and fragrant in its rosy shell
To my table, and carve
With due ceremony.

An unwelcome development: Alana
Has been speaking to Freddie Lounds
Whose shrewd and cynical eye, it seems
Has turned on us. Will senses danger
In the air and follows
My deflection. Ours
The language of spies -
A gestural lexicon.

It is difficult to refrain
From lingering on him
In front of Alana.
His hands are healing
And his voice never falters.
With the fire at his back, its restless light
Could be emanating from him.

Will:

The fire at my back
Is making my skin itch.
I hope they don't
See me sweat.

As dinner draws to a close
I realize Alana
Is staying the night.
This fact is unspoken
Between the three of us.
I return to Wolf Trap, refusing
With every mile to analyze
My anger.

The next day, Freddie
Incapable of ignoring a hunch
Breaks into my shed
Where I find her taking pictures
Of Randall Tier's bones.
His dream body.

The Story of Will Graham
Suddenly finds its sequel
In Freddie's bloodless face.
In the small black gun
She fires at me.
I can already hear typewriter keys
Strike ink onto the scene
As she runs for her car
As I follow with a crowbar
As I smash the window
Drag her screaming
Through the snow.

Retraction, then, continues
Into the blue of evening.
I keep Freddie tied to a chair
Where my dogs nudge
And sniff at her ceaselessly.
Where I explain the lie.
It takes calling Jack
Holding the phone to her ear
Before she believes
And I watch the Story
Upend in her mind.

She's silent, watching me
From within the frame
Of her torn red curls
As I replace the phone in its cradle.
Without grandiosity
She says I'm going to die.
I thank her for the vote

Of confidence, even though
My chances aren't good.

Live bait always dies.
It exists to be desired
And consumed.
But when your prey
Shows you what it wants
You have to listen.

V. Évocation des Ancêtres

Will:

Hannibal's invitation was vague
So I don't know what to think
When I step into his foyer
And hear birdsong.

He greets me, cage in hand
Two little brindled birds
Hopping on their perch.
My first thought
Is that they're pets
But his sidelong smile
Tells me otherwise.

Ortolan buntings -
An ancient French delicacy
Which Hannibal proceeds
To walk me through
With obvious enthusiasm.

He removes one from the cage
Cupping its body gently
In his elegant deadly hands
And releases it into a glass canister
From which it can't escape.
My heart sinks as I watch
But I can't look away.

The birds have stopped singing.
Heads turning, bright eyes catching
The light as they look at each other
From opposite sides of the glass.

Hannibal opens a bottle of brandy
And begins pouring.

The bird in the canister
Dies slowly, in confusion and panic
Drowning, until finally
It goes limp
Its beautiful fanlike feathers
Half open, suspended
In Armagnac like amber.

The bird in the cage
Sings.

Why did you want me to see that?

Hannibal:

Life is devouring, Will
Just as the source of light
Is burning. We consume
Through suffering.
Our very existence predicated
On pain: our own, others'.
Does this make us evil?

Will:

You could have at least
Killed them both at once.

Hannibal:

Your heart
Moves me, Will.

If nature itself negates
Ideas of good and evil
Perhaps we are left
With kindness and cruelty
For their own sake.

Will:

Once both birds are dead
Hannibal empties the canisters
Pouring a measure of brandy
For each of us, and I drink it
Imagining I can taste

The death of those birds.
Their last pulse of life
Like the heart note
In a perfume.

The birds are burning
Brought like a lamp
Or an offering
To the table
And I realize
This is the night.

Hannibal:

Traditionally
At this point in the meal
We would take our napkins
And drape them over our heads
To hide our actions from God.

Will:

But you don't believe in God
Do you?

Hannibal:

No.
And if I did
I would not hide from him.

Will:

Yeah
I can't really imagine you
Doing that.

Hannibal:

I don't want you to feel as though
You need to hide either, Will.
Not from me.
Not from anyone
Or anything.

Will:

He instructs me
To place the bird

Whole in my mouth
And I can feel
His eyes on me
As I do this thing.

The bones crunch
Between my teeth, beneath
Sizzling yellow fat
Organs cooked
Warm brandy
Flooding my mouth
As the lungs burst.
It's delicious.

I look across the table in time
To see Hannibal swallow -
Eyes closed
Face lifted
Into the light
Unrepentant
At peace.

VI. Action Rituelle des Ancêtres

Will:

Lydia Jackson was my first.
We were fifteen and she liked the quiet ones.
She came into orbit around me slowly
Then took my hand one night
At a football game and led me out
Into the darkness beneath the pines
Where the school buses were parked.
The ground was a carpet of fallen needles
And I remember keeping watch
As she pried open a bus door
With her fingers.

I couldn't sift the fear
Desire or doubt
Which might have been mine
From that which might have been hers
So I followed her lead
And we took a seat in the back.

Twenty-two years later
I'm not sure why
I think of Lydia Jackson
As I step up behind Hannibal
Where he stands at the sink
Washing dishes
And place my hands
Just above his hip bones.

This is it, I think.
The moment when a touch
A word
A look
A silence
Makes the intangible
Speculation
Fantasy
Fear
Real.

It's Lydia Jackson
Bright as a candle flame
Climbing onto my lap
Pulling her school sweatshirt
Over her head
Edges of ribcage jutting
From her winter morning skin
Reaching back to unhook
Her cotton training bra.

I think of her nerve
As I move close enough
For Hannibal to feel my breath
On the back of his neck.
He doesn't seem surprised
But I have no idea
What would actually surprise
Hannibal Lecter.

Hannibal:

You noticed my interest?

Will:

You weren't exactly subtle.

Hannibal:

I suppose not.

Will:

He turns off the faucet
Dries his hands carefully
And I try not to think
About the absurdity of seduction.
How I feel like a teenager
Acting out a movie.
Following new dance steps
Praying that if I get them right
I'll lose my footing and be swept
Out to sea where the tides
Carry all to true North.

Hannibal turns within my hands
And some part of me
Should revolt -
Smelling Georgia's pyre
Choking on Abigail's ear
Touching the stones of my cell
Hearing Beverly's blood
Watching the birds drown
But it doesn't.

If anything makes me evil
In this moment, it's the way
The warmth and smell of him
Catch every part of me
With the abandon of iron filings
To a magnet.

When Hannibal lifts
His hand to my face, touches
The pad of his thumb to my lips
I can feel the heat of the water
Lingering in his skin
And smell the dish soap.

If anything makes me cruel
It's that I recognize the tenderness
In Hannibal's eyes
Just before I kiss him.

Hannibal:

The overture is somehow at once
Expected and surprising -

A long-anticipated celebration
Which catches its host unawares.
My perfect arrow, released
Long-journeying, finds its home
Where Will presses me
Back against the countertop.
Where I give my Self over
To the wine of his mouth
And the hunger of his hands.

VII. Danse Sacrale

Will:

I follow him upstairs.
I've never seen this part of the house.
Hannibal's bedroom is warm
Lit by curtained streetlight.
For a moment
I picture Alana here
In this bed, and I feel
The deranged weight of it all
Threaten to turn my stomach

But then Hannibal
Goes into his closet, which is
Predictably
Full of immaculate
Unbelievable clothes.
I watch his precise movements
The unconscious rigidity
Of his posture
And I feel

Recognition
Isn't the right word
But it's close.

When he begins
To unbutton his shirt
I stop his hands
And take over.

Hannibal:

Have you ever been with a man before?

Will:

Does that matter?

Hannibal:

Yes.
It gives me an idea of what to expect.
Of what you might be ready for
And what preparations
I'll need to make.

Will:

No.
I never have.

How many
Have you been with?

Hannibal:

Three.

You seem to be in a hurry, Will
Why?

Will:

Why not?

Hannibal:

Because pleasure should be savored
Especially when it's being tasted
For the first time.

There's a beautiful word
For what you just experienced.

Will:

Your hand down my pants?

Hannibal:

Frisson -
A thrill of excitement

Or fear.

You are
Just as I imagined.

Will:

You imagined
My cock?

Hannibal:

Yes.
You've imagined mine
Haven't you?

Will:

Yes.
Say the word again.

Hannibal:

Frisson.

Will:

Come here.

I can't always tell
Where someone else ends
And I begin. Especially
When touch and breath
And bodies are involved.
If I'm fully myself
Here in Hannibal's bed
I've surprised myself again.
You'd think I would be
Used to it by now.
But the further I go
The deeper I push
The more I find.

Adrift
Hannibal anchors me
And the boundaries of my Self
Are defined by where he touches me.
As though drawing a map
Creates the world.

Hannibal:

See the lover -
Braced for pain and surprised by pleasure. Versed
In affairs which bloom and melt like mayflies.
Averted eyes and unanswered phones.
Raised within a vice of prescriptive sensuality
Now permitted to open
To spread and bind himself like ivy.
A lover who gives himself away
Uncomprehending of his worth.

Will:

Afterwards
I can’t let go
But he doesn’t shrug me off
Or pull away.
He softens inside me
And our sweat grows cold
Where it goes untouched.
He holds me tighter
Letting me take
And take what I need.

Chapter End Notes

As of posting, this is still the longest poem of the cycle so far, oof. It has a special place in my heart not only because Will and Hannibal *finally* have sex, but because Will's memory of his first time was one of the first ideas I had for this story over a year ago <3 This is also a classic example of how a character I considered leaving out of the story altogether ends up becoming not only essential but a POV narrator. Margot surprised me, and I feel like her story hits different in the 1976 setting <3

Birth

Will:

Something is in pain.
An animal out in the snow.
A stag, the forest's stoic king
Limps, moaning, off-balance
Untethered from his mind
By the revelation occurring
Within his body.

The moon has risen full
White shell caught and clawed
In the hands of the winter trees
Its light igniting each curve and point
Of his antlers. Twin black waves
Frozen in the moment of breaking.

Though not in rut, he roars
Seeking language for this hour
His voice learned from the forest -
Too-long limbs keening in the wind
The crack of falling hazelnuts
Groans of the earth as white root cities
Are pulled from its mouth like teeth.

The stag has no thought to spare
For the tracks he makes
For the Other who follows them
Would follow blind, guided
By scent alone, knowing
The time has come.

Unable to go on, the stag sinks
Into the cold star sheddings which begin
To melt beneath his burning weight.
It's far from a birthing bower
But he's never done this before.
The Other approaches with silence
Befitting annunciation.

The stag's antlers churn the snow
As his death throws begin
Until all that moves, moves from within.
The Other waits with silence

(To bless? To feast? To bear witness?)
And at last I am born.

Hannibal:

I wake to Will's dream
To Will dreaming beside me -
Limbs tense, fists white-knuckled
Flickering spasms of fear or denial
Sweat limning his swollen mouth.
He is beautiful.

Minced, I would bed him
In sheets of golden phyllo.
Filleted, I would thread him
Onto skewers of cut apples.

I shift closer and say his name.
When he doesn't wake
I talk quietly to him
Shifting between languages
Poetry and nursery rhymes.
I watch his muscles soften
His brow unfurrow
His face turn
Towards the sound of my voice
And I wonder what form it takes
In his mind.

I don't dream anymore, but
When I wake with music in my ears
Images calling for my hands
Flavors tormenting my empty stomach
I imagine these things must come
From a dreaming place
Pulling aside barbed wire
Crawling below searchlight beams
To cross the border into my waking mind.

Dawn is still hours away
But I have no desire for sleep.
When I put my arm around Will
He curls into me, eyes moving restlessly
Beneath their bruise-dark lids.

I imagine dreaming of Will
Would be like dreaming of air.

Breakfast

Chapter Summary

The Morning After, complete with sexual crisis, childhood trauma, and lots of food.

Will:

The bed is empty when I wake.
It's early still, morning
Turning cobalt blue to dove grey.
There's the swooping world-tilt shift
As I realize I'm not at home
And then remember everything.

I spend so much time reassuring myself
That the lives I live and the crimes I commit
In my mind aren't real. I don't know
What to say now, confronted
With my sore, naked body
In Hannibal Lecter's bed, but
My first thought is one
Of heart-pounding awe -
Shit.

By the smells filling the house
Like Christmas morning
I know Hannibal is in the kitchen.
I get up and go into the en suite
Tiled in chilly porcelain, and then
I have to look at myself in the mirror.

My second thought is
A comprehensive observation -
Fucked. As in -
I am
I was
We are
This is
Hannibal and I

How does it feel to remember
Rather than imagine?

I'm laughing
And then I'm crying
With the water running
Just in case. I'm not ready
To answer that question
Or any of the others.

Yesterday's clothes have been
Laundered, folded, and set out for me
But, jarringly, when I enter the kitchen
I find Hannibal wearing sweatpants
An apron, and nothing else.
He moves within his sanctum
Industrious as a honey bee
Humming along with the radio
Which is playing Handel's *Water Music.*

There's a raw, lurid mark
Dark as a plum, the size of an egg
Between his neck and clavicle.
I stare at it for almost five seconds
Before realizing it's mine.
Suddenly I'm fifteen again, red-faced and hard
With a rush of blood that hits me like sickness.

The kitchen is humid and full of food -
Slabs of black pudding sizzling in a frying pan
Cheese popovers glazed with egg white and honey
Coffee dripping through an antique Russian samovar
Eight different kinds of fruit in a bowl the size of a tire.
There's a pan of tarts in the oven
And Hannibal is whisking meringue.

Are you expecting company?

Hannibal:

No, why do you ask?

Oh.
I may have gotten a little carried away.
I find breakfast to be a rather sentimental meal
Don't you?

Will:

I hadn't thought about it
But yeah
I suppose so.

He pauses, smiling
Then puts down his mixing bowl
And crosses the room to kiss me.
This close, I can see
Where I broke his skin.
He notices my gaze, then
Kisses me again. Reassurance
Forestalling apology.

Hannibal:

Perhaps the significance of breakfast
Comes from the fact that it's the meal
Most commonly shared with one's family.

Will:

I think
When we're kids
It reassures us
Of our own safety, after
Passing through the night.

What's the best breakfast
You ever had?

Hannibal:

Appropriately enough
I believe it was in childhood.
After the war
I went to my uncle's home in France.
I hadn't eaten a proper meal
In a very long time
And they made me feel welcome.
As though it gave them joy
To care for me.

What about you?

Will:

I was nine or ten.
My dad hadn't come home
For almost a week.
He'd never been gone that long before.
I hadn't slept or left the house.
I was trying to decide what I was going to do
If he never came back.

But then he did.
He was exhausted and sick
Wearing the same clothes
Missing a shoe.
He had a broken nose
But he was back.

He took me to a diner
Just this greasy spoon off the highway.
I had breakfast -
Pancakes
Scrambled eggs
Sausage links
Home fries.
He drank black coffee
And watched me eat.

Hannibal:

Did your relief at his return
Make the meal special?

Will:

It was the way he looked at me.
Like he saw me.
Like he was sorry.

Hannibal:

Like you mattered to him.

Will:

Yes.

Mercifully, Hannibal drops the subject.
He takes off his apron
To begin setting the table, and I am
Inescapably reminded of the smell
The heat and oil of human skin.
Soft over fat, firm over muscle.
Imperfect, stippled, smooth.
It cuts lines at the corners of his mouth -
Parentheses which cup
The living definition of *lush*.
His hands are beautiful.

How does it feel to remember
Rather than imagine?

It feels good.

Within an hour of sitting down to eat
We're naked on the dining room floor
And I feel the *frisson* which runs
Through Hannibal's body as I tongue
My bruise-mark upon him.

It's Sunday, but there are still
Essential tasks to complete.
Hannibal wraps up our leftovers
And cancels his Monday morning.
In Wolf Trap I put out extra food for the dogs
And pack an overnight bag
Before getting back in my car.
I barely see the road as I drive.

Cloistered in his house
Hannibal and I fuck
As though we're trying
To consecrate a city
And we eat breakfast all day.

Shiva

Chapter Summary

Birth, life, death, rebirth. Entropy, Whitman, romance, and graverobbing ;)

Will:

At 6am on February 11, 1977
A dead woman is bound to a wheelchair
And set on fire outside the offices
Of *Tattlecrime* newspaper.

At 8:20am on February 11, 1977
Jack Crawford calls to say his team is ready
For me to come to the morgue and look
At the body. I miss this call, because

At 8:20am on February 11, 1977
I'm in Baltimore, washing my hair
For the third time. Hannibal said
He could still smell lighter fluid on me.

Hannibal:

A body engulfed in flames
Like a warbird in the night.
Freddie Lounds identifiable only
By the ivory prized from her jaws.
It's a privilege to stand before Will
The crumbling Icarian martyr between us
Listening to his music, which flows from him now
Free of dissonance, conceived for exactly this.

Will:

It should be more difficult
To be of multiple minds.
To be a lie within a lie within a lie.
But it isn't. There is
Panic and exhilaration
Like riding a roller coaster -
Take a deep breath

Surrender to the momentum
Try not to think about falling.
Try not to think about being
Trapped in perpetual motion.
Try not to think about the possibility
That when you step off the roller coaster
You'll realize you had it all wrong -
Life on land is the diversion.
The roller coaster was your birthright
All along.

At 6pm on February 11, 1977
Margot tells me she's pregnant.
We're in Hannibal's office, and I'm
Looking out through his red-banded curtains
At the snow falling, emerging into
And disappearing from rays of street light.

Hannibal and Margot are talking
About inheritance, legal stipulation
Parental rights, potential risk
Margot's emancipation.
No one says
Used. As in -
I was

But I want to say it. I want to shout it
Into Margot's beautiful face but
Hannibal is watching us, and less than an hour ago
I was sucking his dick in this very room. Why?
For the cause of justice?
As a necessary part of my brilliant plan
To entrap and capture him?
Or just because I wanted to?

Margot's hands are clenched in her lap
And I can't help but feel her terror
At the enormity of the leap she's taking.
She tells me she doesn't want
Anything from me. I don't say
Except for what you already took.

At 10:45am on February 13, 1977
I'm in the cemetery, watching from afar
As the burnt Jane Doe is laid to rest
Under Freddie's name.

Alana has come to pay her respects.
We stand together in snow bright as a scream
Beneath the cloudless sky.
It's been a long time since we knew
How to talk to each other. Since
I felt like the person she wanted to save.

She doesn't say it, but
She thinks I killed Freddie.
She says she drove out to Wolf Trap
To talk to me about Hannibal.
To say that Hannibal isn't good for me
But I wasn't home.

I don't say it, but
I can't stop thinking about why
I wasn't home. The body
We have in common now, and
How we've changed places
In relation to it. Her turn to doubt
My turn to taste.

At 10:45pm on February 13, 1977
I'm listening to Hannibal's heartbeat
Both of us too exhausted to move
Limbs warm and heavy around each other.

I never thought
I would be a father.

Hannibal:

Why not?

Will:

I guess I figured no one
Would want to have a child with me.
Technically that's still true.

Hannibal:

You don't give yourself enough credit.

Will:

I mean I'll try
Try to be there
If Margot lets me.

I think
I would be a good father.

Hannibal:

So do I, *mielasis*.

Will:

Are you going to tell me
What that means?

Hannibal:

I don't think so.

What happened
To your father, Will?

Will:

I don't really know
But I can guess.

A fisherman found his boat
Empty bottles rolling around in it
Drifting in the middle of a lake.
They pulled what was left of him
From the water later that day.

I've always assumed
He went out in that boat
With no intention of coming back.

Hannibal:

A lonely death
Though perhaps a peaceful one.

Will:

I hear the distance in Hannibal's voice
And know he's thinking about his own family.
Carefully
Listening to his heart
I ask him what happened.

Hannibal:

I was born in a castle
Built by my ancestors
Near Vilnius, Lithuania.
A flock of black swans
Lived on the moat.
When I was six
My sister Mischa was born.
She loved the color aubergine
And taking her baths
In the kitchen garden.
We threw bread to the swans
And wanted for nothing.

Then the war found us.
Bombers crisscrossed the sky
With a tearing sound so great
It was like the world
Was made of paper.
The swans flew away
And the ones who couldn't
Were torn apart by the tanks.

I was eight and Mischa was three
When our parents fled with us
To a hunting lodge in the woods
Leaving the castle to be plundered
And our people to fend for themselves.

We lived in hiding
For almost four years
Before the front collapsed.
Russian soldiers found us
A German bomber found them.
A fight broke out, ending
When the plane crashed
Its fuel and weapons igniting.

I chose to save Mischa
As our parents burned.
We were the only survivors
Stranded in the forest
As wolves came to eat the dead
And winter fell.

Deserting soldiers found us -
Lithuanians turned *Hilfswillige*
Forsaken by the Nazis
Masquerading as medics

Hiding from the Soviets
Looking for hostages.
Hungry people in winter.

They caught a few birds
Once a little half-starved deer.
Mischa's copper bathtub
Was just the right size to fit
Inside the fireplace for cooking.
They sucked grease from hair combs
Scooped rotten flesh from tire treads
But soon there was nothing
And Mischa was burning with fever.

Afterwards
They told me
She wouldn't have survived.

Waste not
Want not.

Will:

We're silent for a long time
After Hannibal tells me this.
I can't feel his heartbeat
Over the pounding of my own.
Then, abruptly, he gets out of bed
Straight-backed as a circus showman
And announces with a smile
That we have business to attend to.

At 12am on February 14, 1977
We're climbing the cemetery wall.
We take turns keeping watch and digging
Through the fresh dirt of Freddie's grave
And then two more, until Hannibal has
His desired ingredients.

My hands and feet are numb
Clothes and shoes soaked with snow.
I barely notice, transfixed
Bearing witness to Hannibal's art.
He's revitalized, almost frenetic
With the joy of inspiration.
Everything he touches is transformed
Even death. Especially death
As an unclaimed, desecrated woman
Is resurrected from the earth

Head held high, legs carefully folded
Arms radiating out from her
Like a halo of wings.
Shiva deified.

I have heard what the talkers were talking
The talk of the beginning and the end
But I do not talk of the beginning
Or the end.

Hannibal:

There was never any more inception than there is now
Nor any more youth or age than there is now
And will never be any more perfection than there is now
Nor any more heaven or hell than there is now.

Will:

By the time he's finished
The clouds have rolled back
Leaving the moon, almost full
To watch us pick our way
Through the cemetery, over the wall
To where my car is parked
Half-hidden beneath snow-laden trees
On the shoulder of a back road.

I direct Hannibal to the backseat
Where I pull him to me
As soon as the doors close.
Even though we're cold, dirty
Sleep-deprived, blistered
Way too close to a crime scene
He responds as though this is
As though I am
Perfect.

I need to touch him
While he still smells like death.
To taste the sweat and graveyard dirt
Grimed deep in the lines of his skin.
To feel the way he shivers
When I lick him clean.
In the backseat of my car
I fuck Hannibal Lecter
Because life is heartless
And so are we.

No.
That's a lie.
The truth is so much worse.

The truth is that the idea of Margot's baby
(*My* baby) makes me want to survive
The way Abigail made me want to survive.

The truth is that I kiss Hannibal
Until my mouth aches, muscles trembling
And then I continue to kiss him.

Life is heartless.
We aren't.

Hannibal:

I have yet to tire of undressing Will. Peeling back
The dense layered husk of canvas and flannel
Until he emerges into my hands
Like a lotus blossom.

How could anyone
Not want all of him?

We warm the cold car
Until our air becomes water
Which beads and glides
Down the window
Along Will's wrist
As he braces his hand
Against the glass.

Will:

Urge and urge and urge
Always the procreant urge of the world.

Hannibal:

Out of the dimness opposite equals advance
Always substance and increase
Always sex

Which begins
To enter its final heat
As our expanding galaxy of two
Turns, intent to contract, chasing
Terminus a quo

The end from which
All begins.

And Will
In my arms
Heart thundering
Bound to me
Like ivy.

Will:

I and this mystery
Here we stand.

Hannibal:

Happy Valentine's, Will.

Will:

At 4:50am on February 14, 1977
I'm back in the cemetery feeling
As though I never left, playing
My part on autopilot, standing
Beneath Shiva, thinking
About who she might have been.

The fear in Alana's voice
As she analyzes the unknown
Courting killers in duet with this corpse
Plays on my periphery like a radio
In another room. She knows
Enough now. It's time
To bring her into the lie.

At 7:30pm on February 19, 1977
Hannibal and I are in his office
For my standing appointment.
I suppose it's nice to know my therapy
Wasn't just a pretext for seduction.

Hannibal:

Are you familiar with entropy, Will?

Will:

A little. It has to do
With energy distribution.

Hannibal:

Yes. A fire, for example
Demonstrates entropy.
Solid fuel burns, becoming
Smoke, ash, carbon dioxide
All of which spread the energy
Trapped within the fuel.
In watching the fire burn
We perceive time itself.

Will:

Irreversible.

Hannibal:

Theoretically.

Will:

Theoretically?

Hannibal:

Energy can neither be created
Nor destroyed, only rearranged.
Transformed.

When I was very young
I experienced mathematics
As a revelation. The underpinning
Of reality like veins in a leaf.
Science, anatomy, music, art
Time itself melted into shape
From a desert of numbers.

Will:

Are you telling me you're trying
To invent a time machine?

Hannibal:

I'm reassuring you -
If all of time exists at once
Like energy, then
Nothing is ever lost
And may be found again.

Will:

You're talking
About Abigail.

I still dream about her.
About giving her
A happier life.
Proving she wasn't
That *we* weren't
Doomed.

Hannibal:

For my part
I'm sorry, Will.

Will:

Why did you do it?
Why were you compelled
To break us?
To watch us break?

Time only moves forwards, Hannibal.
No one comes back to life.

Hannibal:

Except when they do.
When dried blood becomes wet again
Pulled back to safety within knitting skin.
When crushed throats open
Hungry hands unclench, retreating.
When the dark road is avoided
And everyone comes home safe.

Will:

That
Only ever happens
In my head.

Hannibal:

Exactly.
In your head
Where all things exist

Without beginning
And without end.

The prophet is one
Who sees through time
To perceive its shape.
Who laments a weight
No one else feels.

But if that shape were to change -
If entropy were to reverse
And everything lost was renewed
As swans return with spring
Would you welcome it?
Or would you mourn the safety
Of your helplessness?

Will:

Wouldn't we just be helpless
In the opposite direction?

I don't say this.
Instead

At 7:43pm on February 19, 1977
I tell Hannibal Lecter
I want to believe
I would welcome anything
That could bring Abigail back.

Mason & Margot

Chapter Summary

Margot tries to believe in her future and break free from Mason.

CW: abuse, mention of child molestation and r*pe

Margot:

When we were children
Our father taught Mason
How to measure the depth
Of a pig's fat. The thickness
Of their skin. How to knife them
Just so: fast and precise as a vaccine.

Our father taught Mason
Practical skills for raising animals
Running the business
But Mason learned a different lesson.
He carried a knife with him
Always after that, approaching
Show pigs at the fair
The ones raised and fawned over
Like beloved pets, who moved
Instinctively towards his outstretched hand
With their snuffling breath and fleshy noses.

Mason learned to love the turn
When trust is broken
And fear emerges.
To this day I don't know
Whether he understands cruelty.
In his mind
It all makes sense.

There's a look he gets
When he's confused and trying
To hide his confusion.
I saw it when we were nineteen
And the police showed up
The first time to arrest him

For molesting a second-grader.
When I was silent and refused
To answer their questions.

He got off with parole
A private settlement
Court-ordered therapy.
Transactional pragmatism
Which is almost like morality
If you have the money for it.

Will doesn't have the money for it
And I try not to think about Mason
To feel like Mason, when I think
About how I've used Will.
I tell myself
I didn't choose Will
Because he lacks power.
I chose him because
He understands cruelty
And still wants to be gentle.

Gentle
Is what I feel
When I spread my hand
Over the skin of my belly.
It's barely been a month
But I know I can feel it. Life
Like the frantic heartbeat
Of a newborn rabbit in my palm
Its body so impossibly small.
Gentle.

I never thought
I would be a mother.

Whenever our mother managed
To be sober long enough to notice us
It was always with dull surprise
As though trying to remember
Where we had come from.

I started menstruating at twelve
Dimly aware that I was meant
To feel like a Woman, but
All it meant to me was that if I were raped
I could become pregnant.
Being a Woman meant being at once

Magnetic and vulnerable. The red scrap
Of cloth waved before a bull.

Happiness
Always felt like
Too much to ask for.
Even when things started happening
In San Francisco, New York
In Baltimore just last year
And gay people started saying *we* -
We weren't sick
We weren't unspeakable
We weren't a joke
We weren't alone.

I was silent and refused
To let myself believe
That story was for me.

But now
I spread my hand
Over the skin of my belly
And I can feel it.
If I can have this
If *this* is possible
Anything is.

Something new
Something innocent and good
Grown from the part of me
Which has not and can never be
Touched by Mason.
Someone who holds to me
Reaches out from me as from
An immovable compass needle.
Someone for whom
I can be perfect.

At 11:35am on February 22, 1977
Mason finds me in the stables
Untacking my horse.
I hear the smile in his voice
And ice blooms at the base of my spine.

Mason has been thinking
About posterity, heritage
The future of our family.
He says he doesn't want

To see me disinherited.
He wants us to be closer.
The ice tree branches through me
As Mason says
He wants us to have a baby.
In his mind
It all makes sense.

I feel his outstretched hand just before
His fingers close on my braid, slowly
Wrapping it around his wrist
Like a rope, pulling me back to him.

At 3am on February 23, 1977
I run away from home.
One suitcase, taking
Back roads to Wolf Trap, praying
Will won't turn me away.

Twenty miles from the Virginia line
It all comes crashing down
In glass and shrieking metal
Impact wrenching me
Across the icy blacktop
And all I can do is scream
As the trap closes.

It's not that Mason loves me
Too much to kill me.
At least I hope
That's not what it is.
Please

If anyone
Anything
Is listening.
Please don't let this be
All there is of love.

The ice tree of me is complete now
Frozen solid on the operating table
Eyes watering beneath the blinding light
As my brother explains how and why
He will take everything from me
Until all that's left of me
Is him.

He looks down at me
And I can see it, just for a second

In the depths of his eyes.
That flicker of confusion
Trying to understand why
I did this to us.

A Hunter In The Palace

Chapter Summary

> Will dreams himself into Hannibal's mind palace, where he talks to ghosts and faces his demon.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

> Will:
>
> *I leave the lights on in my little house*
> *And walk out into the woods*
> *With a shotgun and my dogs.*
> *When I look back from a distance*
> *The house is like a boat at sea*
> *And all around me the whispering*
> *Watchful heart of night.*
> *The air is cool, earth sighing in relief*
> *As a heat wave begins to break.*
> *Clouds have been rinsed*
> *From the midnight blue bowl*
> *Of a sky waiting for moonrise.*
> *I still and listen, separating sounds -*
> *Nocturnal birds*
> *Small scattering animals*
> *Invisible serrations of grass*
> *Dogs breathing in the dark*
> *Waiting.*
>
> *I push deeper, stalking and silent*
> *Beneath low branches, taking*
> *Care where I step, bracing*
> *For the traitorous snap, but*
> *The forest floor is soft.*
> *Where trees thin moss and grass become*
> *A road of Persian silk, knotted flowers*
> *Glowing pink and gold, blue in the moonlight.*
> *The skin of the trees bears fruit and angels*
> *Moulded in bas relief, growing limbs*
> *Slowly breaking marble walls, leaves*
> *Shivering the cut crystal raindrops*

Of chandeliers in Hannibal's palace.
Moonlight here is daylight beyond -
A corrosive winter day, merciless as ice
But the palace windows are high above
Far away, choked with leaves
Protecting our fervid wine-dark
Summer, in which heat lightning branches
Beneath The Creation of Adam in fresco.
Protecting my forest, in which the ghosts bleed.

They chant me from the trees
My muses of the hunt split and pillaged.
Scraped hollow they chant me
From broken jaws and severed tongues.
One by one I pause to recite the catechism of them -
Their names, lives, and deaths.
The ordinances to be performed
As the forest folds them into itself.
The ashy shape of Georgia appears
In the bark of birch trees, like the impressions
Of people burned onto walls in Hiroshima.
Abigail watches me from behind a curtain
Of willow branches, patient and still.
The hunter she was born to be.
My forest has planted Beverly in vines
Reaching out and pulling close, rising
A single woven being.

I follow the blood
Still wet, brighter than the movies
And find Margot in the tall grass
Beneath a laurel tree, its branches
Already winding in her soft dark hair.
In the cavernous false moonlight
Her skin is the color of black-lip oyster shells.
It almost looks as though she wears
A long red skirt, its demarcation
The incision across her belly.
You don't have to stay here, I tell her.
It's not too late for you.
She watches me, tears silent and steady
As her fingernails dig into the tree.
I wanted to believe, she says.
That I could turn my life like pages in a book.
Everything I am just words lighter than feathers.
I know, I say, but when I reach out to her
She twists away from my hand

Against the tree which expands, taking a breath
Taking her in as she turns to its heartwood.

I back away, listening to the thunder
Of my forest opening, drawing them in
Until with a great shuddering gasp the gates close
And every tree exhales fireflies. Ghosts enough
To create a green glowing cosmos
Across indigo palace ceilings.

They ascend, nameless now
Freed from their crime scene photos
Locked drawers full of autopsy reports
Returned to their Selves. I watch them
Feeling lost, irrelevant in the end
The gun in my hands capable only of death
Which is not justice, healing, or resurrection.
Death, which perhaps means nothing to the dead.
From the multitude, a firefly becomes aware
Of me, drifting to hover at my shoulder
Its light pulsing gently. Hello

I don't want you to feel
As though you're missing out.
You don't owe this world anything.
All things considered, you're pretty lucky.
You were hoped for, dreamt of. Held
In a way we grow to forget
But never stop wanting.
You've been spared so much.

I would've taught you to fix things
Build things. I would have taught you
How to fish and tie your shoes.
If every gesture we made in love
Built armor to keep those we love safe
If it was as simple as building a crib
Or holding hands to cross the street
I would be happy to show you this world.
I would believe so many beautiful things.

Life is a miracle or a disaster
Depending on where you happen
To fall beneath its boot.
If you want my advice, live
Where everything is possible
Without beginning or end.
Touch this world and go on.

I don't want you to see
What comes next.

Once the fireflies have gone
My forest is restless, inconsolable. A house
Where every door swells with the heat in summer
And nights are spent desperately seeking sleep
When every movement and surface touched
Becomes sweat and grime on the skin.
In the distance a hound begins to bay
Summoning a chorus of yips, barks, and howls.
I follow their voices away from the light
Until I'm moving blindly, the ground beneath me
Beginning to angle downwards
Guiding me into a ravine, towards
The heart of the palace.
I know I'm trespassing
On someone else's land, though where
I crossed the boundary line, I can't say.
There are no ghosts here.
No silk or chandeliers.
There is a forest
And there is a pit.

An ancient black alder arches over the edge
Its great coiling roots spilling down
Into impenetrable darkness, and there
What I took to be a jut of broken rock
Is a stair, is many stairs, spiraling down.
The dogs begin to whine
Darting back and forth around my ankles
But they listen
When I tell them to stay.
I leave my gun in the roots of the alder
And begin my descent.

It's colder here.
I always thought it would be.
The stairs of the pit are just wide enough
Sturdy and evenly spaced, so I feel no fear
Of falling as the light melts away.
I don't need light to see. My hand running
Along the side of the pit shows me
Layers of soil, clay, and rock. It shows me
The underforest of smooth pale roots branching
Stretching out and downwards forever.
The opening of the pit is a shadowy moon above me
And I can't hear the dogs anymore.

The silence of the pit becomes its own noise -
Blood pulsing in my ears
My breath a tidal wind
Earth falling from my fingertips
Hitting the stairs in counterpoint
To the steady beat of my footsteps.
There's no need for stealth.
There never was. I realize
The pit does not allow me to find him.
I was never trying to find him.
I was trying to see him.

Without light I find the end of the stairs
And a close, circular space as though
The pit is a perfect cylindrical volume.
We are breathing, and all I have to do
Is hold out my hand. Touch
Scent and sound show me
The Other, lean and starved, soft
Oily skin sheathing a body
Strong as wood. His hands
God his hands
Create my body
As though he's sculpting it
From the cold wet air
And his mouth brings it to life
Like blowing on an ember.

I pin him, pushing him
Into the ground, pushing
Into him, and when
He tips his head back
Our antlers, locked together
Pull me down to him.
When I move in him, he moves
In me, hard and full, creating
My body from the inside out. My hands
Show me the smooth frantic knot
Of insistent muscle where his hips
Become mine, where thighs
Legs and feet should have been.
My hands show me his heart pounding
Lungs swelling and shrinking
His caged voice in the taut column
Of his neck within my hands tightening
And we gasp, choking, his fingers digging
Into me, urging our clumsy piston.

I strangle him, my heart churning broken glass
And in the world above it begins to rain.

Water pours down the sides of the pit
Raindrops breaking, rolling over our skin
Running from our antlers, our open mouths
Pooling and sloshing around us, threatening
To unmoor us. I release our throat
Driving clay beneath my fingernails
As I dig my hands into the wet earth
Finding root-reins, pulling myself
Down to his mouth, where we kiss
Until we drown.

Chapter End Notes

I spent a long time avoiding this poem, mostly because I knew that writing the section where Will talks to the soul of his unborn child was going to be emotionally difficult. And it *was*.

Morning

Chapter Summary

Will confronts Hannibal about his role in what happened to Margot.

Hannibal:

The bed is empty when I wake
Will's rumpled nest within it
Still damp to the touch with nightmares.
I pull on a robe and make my way
Through the house to find him
In the kitchen where he sits, fully dressed
With a cup of coffee between his hands.
His hair is a mess, matted and sprung
Clothes wrinkled and careless
But it's his face which makes me pause.
Wan and holloweyed, he could be wearing
His own death mask, every shadow a bruise.
The skin around his eyes swollen pink
Wiped raw by his rough fingers.

Can I get you anything?

When he doesn't answer
I move to stand beside his chair
And cup the back of his neck
Moving my thumb over the soft hair at his nape.
At my touch he closes his eyes, reaching up
To place his hand over mine. He takes a breath
Before looking at me.

Will:

You told me
If nature itself negates
Ideas of good and evil
We're left with kindness
And cruelty
For their own sake.

How do you think Mason found out
Margot was pregnant?

Hannibal:

He may have persuaded her doctor
To an indiscretion. Perhaps
He simply discovered the same loophole
In their father's will and decided
To make a preemptive strike.

Will:

Or maybe
You told him.

Hannibal:

Why
Would I do that?

Will:

To see
What would happen.
But also because
You don't want me to have
Anything in my life
That isn't you.

Hannibal:

That's not true.

He takes my hand from his neck and holds it
Between us on the countertop. I watch
The tears gather in his eyes.

Will:

Life is devouring.
Killing is power.
Power feels good.

I get it. But
Margot didn't
Deserve cruelty.
And you
Listened to me talk
About my father, about
The kind of father
I wanted to be.
You knew I wanted it.

Hannibal:

I did, but
I also knew
Fathering Margot's child
Would have meant rebuilding
Your life on an unbalanced
And exploitative cornerstone.

We aren't always meant
To have what we want
At the first opportunity. Often
What seems like our only chance
Is merely the foretaste
Of a greater future.

Will lowers his head to our hands
And weeps.
It is unaffected and helpless.
Hurt beyond anger
Defeat deeper than despair.

I ache for him.

What do you need
From me, Will?

He shakes his head, quieting
Drawing back into himself
Then sits up, not looking at me.
After a long moment
He eases back the sleeve of my robe
Turning my forearm to expose
The pale fishbone scar
Along the inside of my wrist.
He kisses it gently
And leaves the house.

Feast

Chapter Summary

Winston is afraid when Hannibal brings a stranger into Will's house.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

He smells like Will
And we know his name
Hannibal
So we do not challenge
When he brings
The stranger
Into our shelter.
The stranger sleeps
While Hannibal works.
The stranger wakes
And is unsafe
As one called
By the dying
And birthing light
Though the sky
Outside is empty.
His voice is bad
Eyes wide and rolling
Mouth hungering
Loud hands
Reaching for us
As we run from him
Looking to Hannibal
Confused
Waiting for him
To lead us
Because Will is
Not here.
We are afraid
But Hannibal is
Not afraid.
Hannibal gives
Knife
To the stranger

And the smell of
Blood
Warm
Good
Fills our shelter
As the stranger
Begins to make
Himself
A kill.
The others
Are hungry
And they go to him
Eat from him
Drink from him
Even though
His voice is bad
And Knife
Is in his loud hands.
I call to them
To stop
But they
Do not
And Hannibal
Does not
Stop them.
Hannibal watches
And is not afraid.
I push at the door
Calling for Will
Until Hannibal
Lets me out.
I wait in the cold
Smelling the blood
Listening
To the eating
Waiting for Will.
When he returns
His voice is good
His smell is
Home.
His hands
Are quiet.
He calls me
By my name
Winston.
He understands
I am afraid.
I follow him

Into our shelter.
He sees the kill
The eating.
He smells afraid
But does not
Act afraid.
He does not
Challenge Hannibal
Or the stranger
So I do not
Challenge.
Will and Hannibal
Take the stranger away.
The others
Lick the blood
And outside
Snow begins
To fall.
Night is almost over
Before we see
Eyelights in the snow
Of the creature
Which brings Will
And Hannibal.
Will brings Hannibal
Back into our shelter
But Will does not
Smell afraid
Or act afraid
So we
Do not challenge.
Will makes a fire
And they come together
Not in challenge
But as mates.
Some of us retreat
To the corners
To other rooms
And some of us wait
Watching
Until Hannibal
Is belly up
Beneath Will
On the bed.
Until we know
They do not fight
To wound
Or kill.

Day comes
Its light darkened
By the snow.
Will and Hannibal
Make food
Feed us.
Will brings us
Out into the snow.
Night comes
Day follows
But they are still
Within their hunger
Returning over and over
To each other
To the bed
To the floor
To the walls
Until they sleep
As the snow builds blue
Against the windows.
Will keeps feeding
The fire
Even though
Their heat
Fills our shelter
Makes us restless
Dizzy with rut
Until we call out.
Until Will and Hannibal
Push back the snow
To open the door
To let us out.
The cold makes us feel
Like we can breathe
Burying ourselves
In the snow.
Their creatures wait Lifeless
Beneath the snow.
The road is lost
Beneath the snow.
Will and Hannibal
Return to the bed
Calling to each other
Pushing
Pulling
Clinging to each other
And I watch
Waiting

For Hannibal
To threaten.
When they sleep
Curled together
Breathing together
I wake
Lifting my head
To make sure.

Chapter End Notes

Here's another point where I wanted to deviate from the show by skipping the subplot where Mason's goons capture Hannibal and Will has to choose whether to kill or free him. I really liked the idea of my Hannibal torturing Mason purely as a way of apologizing to Will, and Will accepting that apology, um, *enthusiastically*. I think the show draws a pretty clear parallel between Mason/Margot and Hannibal/Will, so I've had fun exploring that. The scene where Mason feeds himself to the dogs (Will's avatars in a way) becomes a metaphor about Hannibal making himself emotionally vulnerable to Will.

Debriefing

Chapter Summary

Jack asks Will to bring him up to speed on his efforts to entrap Hannibal, but Will has other things on his mind.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will:

Once the snow stops
Jack drives out to Muskrat Farm
To visit Mason Verger, who recites
The story Margot fed him
After he regained consciousness.

Once the snow stops
I drive down to Quantico
To meet with Jack, who asks me
Whether I have actionable evidence
Against Hannibal Lecter.

His teeth, I want to say.
The best joke of all
Is that Hannibal's teeth are sharp
Long and white. Central incisors
Chiseled slightly inward
Eye teeth prominent. I know now
Why his smiles are reserved
Close-mouthed.
It would be too much
To see those teeth
So perfectly made
For tearing.

Jack and I both know
Evidence isn't our problem.
Our problem is that I'm the only witness
To the evidence, and as it stands
No judge or jury worth a damn
Would find me credible.

Hannibal and I have almost finished eating
The cuts we butchered from Randall Tier
(Tastes like pork, as predicted.)
Any trial of Hannibal Lecter should end
With both of us behind bars. Or dead.

Jack wants to know
Whether Hannibal has ever spoken to me
About a patient named Mason Verger.

His blood, I want to say
Stains the floor of my living room
Where Hannibal told him
To feed his face to my dogs.
He broadened their palates, Hannibal said
Just as I've broadened yours.

I tried to prepare myself
For a number of things
When I decided to seduce
Hannibal Lecter -
Domination
Humiliation
Kink
Pain.

Granted, there's been
A certain amount of that.
It's taught me things
I'd rather not know
About myself.

I wasn't prepared for softness.

Hannibal draws me sleeping.
He draws me half in shadow.
Hannibal draws me as a warrior charging
And he draws me carried away by swans.

In the scrape of pencil point on paper
I hear the movement of his hand
Which is the movement of his mind
And across his pages
These careful lines of me
Walk ancient cities I've never seen.

Jack says he's only told his superiors
What they need to know. He asks

Whether there's anything
I haven't told him.

It's probably a moot point, I want to say
But I'm having a sexual crisis.
I've been surrounded by men
My entire adult life. Is it possible
I could have wanted this before
Without realizing it?

Hannibal has realized
How much I like his hands, so now
He teases me with them.
Exactly when I want him
To go faster, he slows down
Pulling back to move his hands
Over me, smiling at the desperation
Of my arousal. The bewilderment I feel
Towards my own body.

I like this Hannibal -
The one who can't be bothered
To square his shoulders
Smooth back his hair.
The one who finally shuts up
Rolls me over and pushes me down
Into the mattress where I imagine
Pulling slim dark feathers of tender meat
From the beautiful bones of his hands.

I think back to the window of time
In which I believed Hannibal Lecter
Was exactly who he appeared to be.
I remember the night he invited me
To stay for dinner and I refused
Offering tongue-tied excuses
And a bottle of cheap wine.
If I had said yes
If I had lingered
As the other guests left
Until Hannibal and I were alone.
If Hannibal had taken the opportunity
To make a pass at me
Would I have said yes to him
Wholehearted in my ignorance?
Would I have slept with him that night?
Would it have been more painful
For that Will Graham to learn

The truth about his lover
Rather than his friend?
Somehow
I don't think so.

Jack cautions me
Not to get lost in empathy.
Not to confuse what I want
With what Hannibal wants.

But that's the thing, I'll never say
To absorb so much of another's mind
The essence of their personhood
Until you feel their feelings
As your own, is, in a sense
To become them.

It's the risk I've taken
To make Hannibal believe me
But blaming my empathy
My study in the spellcraft of killers
Is too easy. The truth is
Always worse.

I know who I am.
I know who I'm afraid of being.
I know I've spent my life feeling
The weight of a universe trying
To pour itself through the unwilling
Funnel of me, but
Now that everything
Everything
Is permitted
Nothing
Is as heavy
As I thought it would be.

It's enough.
Why is it enough?
Why is it so much more than enough?

I'm not ready to answer
Any of these questions, but
If someone were to ask
What would I say?

Everything fits.
Everything fills.
Everything is received.

Everything is wanted
And everything
Tastes good.

Chapter End Notes

I imagine all of the poems being performed/delivered on stage to an audience, but this one in particular *really* feels like it's meant to be a spoken word piece. For a long time as I was writing my way through season 2 I had a poem called "Taste" where I was just kind of depositing bits of smut that didn't fit anywhere else. My idea for "Taste" was that it would talk about all the different levels on which Hannibal and his aestheticism appeal to Will, as well as giving Will space to reflect on himself and his own past re: sexuality, sensuality, etc. There was also another poem called "Drawing, Part One" about Hannibal drawing Will, and I couldn't figure out where to fit either of them into my story. Then when I was rewatching episode 12, I got to this scene and Jack's question ("...now what haven't you told me?") and it was one of those beautiful moments where a wall suddenly collapses in my mind and all the light comes in. "Taste" and "Drawing, Part One" ended up getting torn to bits to make this poem, and it's one of my favorites in the whole project so far <3

Event Horizon

Chapter Summary

Will gets the chance to sit down with Bedelia Du Maurier.

Bedelia:

As soon as Mr. Graham enters the interrogation room
I realize I should have been expecting this.
Having been pardoned
Released from captivity
Mr. Graham might have retreated into anonymity
Licking his wounds in the peace of a new life
Somewhere far away from the nightmare he escaped.
So of course he is still here.

Will:

Bedelia Du Maurier
Sits with perfect composure
At the interrogation room table
Looking like the wife of a cultural attaché
Rather than a fugitive. Her fear invisible
Save for the wrought iron inflexibility
Of her shoulders.

I never got a chance to thank you
For visiting me in the hospital.

Bedelia:

The advice I tried to give you
Doesn’t seem to have done much good.

Will:

What advice
Would that be?

Bedelia:

If you continue to challenge Hannibal
Continue to repair yourself

He will never tire of breaking you.

Will:

Why?

Bedelia:

Because he's searching
For something unbreakable.
I think he's forgotten that
Slumbering all these years
In the depths of his fortress.

Will:

Why did you go into hiding?

Bedelia:

He let me see too much of himself
And I know I am disposable to him.
Making myself indispensable, however
Was the more dangerous temptation.
It's a powerful thing to know someone
Who insists on being unknowable.

Will:

And what would
Make that dangerous?

Bedelia:

Hannibal does not trust easily
And if he is still capable of love
It would take him
With the all-consuming desperation
Of a drowning man fighting for air.

Will:

She looks me in the eyes
As she says this, and of course
She knows.
The silence between us
Unsheathes claws, and
I realize she's known
From the beginning.

How
Would you catch him?

Bedelia:

Hannibal's hunger is more than
Epicurean and aesthetic.
It is destructive, joyful in annihilation.
He is compelled to break things
And to make that breaking beautiful.

Will:

Once he's decided
To make something his art
He has to see it
Through to the end.

Bedelia:

At the end of our interview
Mr. Graham thanks me for my time.
I watch him leave with
An unaccountable sense of grief.
Some time later
Agent Crawford asks me
Whether I think Will is in danger
Of being indispensable to Hannibal Lecter.
I don't know that Mr. Graham isn't watching
From behind the two-way mirror
So I tell Agent Crawford, yes
That's what I was implying.

Will:

Hannibal draws me as a prophet in desert caves.
He draws me naked, peeling a clementine.
Hannibal dreams through his drawings of me
And he draws me to remember.

But more than that
He draws to see me.
To meditate on every detail of me.
I'm good at holding still for him
Like a deer spotting its hunter.
Possessed through the act of seeing.

Tonight he arranges me
Like despondent drapery

Over the couch in his office.
He tells me I am Achilles
Mourning the death of my lover
Patroclus. Far away
I feel a spark of memory.

As Hannibal tells me their story
I look down at the empty place on the couch
Where Patroclus will be in the drawing
Picturing the broken man
Who masqueraded as a hero.
Who must have known he would die
Helping Achilles cheat fate.

Hannibal pauses to sharpen his pencil.
I watch him, his bare shoulders in the firelight
Hair coming loose, falling into his eyes.

At 9:05pm on March 4, 1977
I take a deep breath and tell him
We need to kill Jack.

Orchestrations Of Carbon

Chapter Summary

Hannibal's planning to run away with Will...until he catches a familiar scent.

Hannibal:

No music belongs
To its instrument alone.
It requires the touch and breath
The soul of another
To bring it to life.

I think about this on my knees
Careful of my fingering
Attentive to the slick salty reed
The precise tongueing required
To make my instrument sing.
It does so exquisitely
But then Will
Flushed, hot to the touch
Pulls me up by my hair
Insistent in his harmonizing line.
Our music finally complete
Now that he plays me in turn.

Will:

This has to work.
If it doesn't, I don't know
What we're going to do.
My testimony against Hannibal
Will mean almost nothing, but
Special Agent Jack Crawford
Head of Behavioral Science
Might have a chance.
If he survives.

Hannibal thinks
I'm running away with him.
That we will put these lives
This place behind us

The world at our feet.
He doesn't want
To kill Jack. I can feel it
Like a small sharp bone
Needling the inside of his cheek
But he tortured, mutilated Mason
For me, without me intending
To pull those strings.
I can do this.
He has to believe
I want this
For just a little while longer.

Hannibal:

Jack told me
Bella doesn't want flowers or food
No funereal touch in the room
Where she waits for death
So I come to her empty-handed
To sit at her bedside and listen.

Her skin has begun to go grey
A wash of rain cloud over her loveliness
The skull beneath sensing
This ghost it wears will soon be shed.
She tells me she is waiting
For forgiveness. As though
It is a friend who will take her hand
Leading the way to peace.

I observe that she has every right
To her anger: At me, at Jack
At life, death and circumstance.
Peace which comes
From the fulfillment of anger
Rather than its release
Is still peace.

She regards me, unblinking
Her lungs threadbare bellows heaving
Within the heaviness of their cage.
You're assuming, she says
You can control forgiveness
Any more than you can
Control anger
Or peace.

You control nothing
Least of all your Self.

Will:

Freddie's restlessness is obvious
In the surveilled safehouse
Where she spends her days writing
Waiting for Hannibal's arrest.
She shows me her notes
The Story of Will Graham
Carefully organized on index cards
Her face betraying no hint
Of self-consciousness
As I read her frank speculation
About my "pathological gravitation"
Towards Hannibal Lecter.

When I imagine my future
A book-length epitaph
Penned by Freddie Lounds
It doesn't fill me with the despair
I might have expected.
I'm not sure why.
The only request I make
(Which will probably be ignored)
Is that Freddie not write
About Abigail.

When I arrive at Hannibal's office
He tells me it's time to burn his books.

Hannibal:

When I climb the ladder to the mezzanine
Begin pulling my notebooks from their shelves
I see Will's confusion, his incredulity
And it is for this sweetness that I throw
The books down one by one
Loose pages and papers
A whole long chapter of my life
Falling about him like leaves
Bound for the fire. It's nothing
Compared to what will come next.
I can't wait to show him
How good life can be.
How these ashes will yield
The brightest flowers he has ever seen.

Will:

It's hard not to linger over the books
Once I start opening them.
It seems impossible that his handwriting
Isn't a naturally occurring phenomenon
Like spiral galaxies and snail shells.
I'm stilled by a heart-tripping jolt
When I read my name in his hand.
When I realize the book I hold
Is my story, *our* story
And such a small part of it.
The testament of a few months
Not even two years, which have eclipsed
All that came before.

...no one would blame him for missing
The opening strains of this new movement
A key change ominous in its unconcern...

No animal, however painfully trapped
Could fail to appreciate
The beauty of such a hunter.

I wonder how long this room
Will remember us
After we're gone.

Hannibal:

If walls could talk we would have to burn
The whole building to the ground.

Will:

I don't know.
I think I would like to hear
What they might have to say.

Do you think you'll add any of it
To your memory palace?

Hannibal:

All, I would imagine.

Will:

Really?

Hannibal:

Over the years I've engraved
A memory onto almost every object.
This is also one of the rooms
In which I have known you, perhaps
The main stage of our acquaintance.
I don't want to lose any of it.

Will:

Does having your palace make it easier
To start a new life? Like a home
You never have to leave?

Hannibal:

Yes and no.
It's a library of sorts
A refuge and a kingdom
But it's also the living document
Of my life. It grows
In ways I can't control, and so
There are many places within it
I can no longer go.

Will:

That
Makes sense.

I had a stream
In the hospital.

Hannibal:

Did it help?

Will:

Sometimes.

Hannibal:

If you want to relocate your stream
To the grounds of my palace
You're more than welcome.

Will:

He grins over the rail of the mezzanine
At me, and I see it so clearly -
Hannibal, jumpsuited in a cell
Sitting on a bare mattress
Stinking toilet in the corner
His eyes dull and absent
Self hidden away. Cages
All the way down.
Will that Hannibal
Be able to say
Freedom within
Is still freedom?

I turn from him
Bringing an armful of books
To the fire, feeding
Our story to the flames.

Hannibal:

Will stands in front of the fire
Feeding my papers to it.
His shoulders move, and
I can feel them beneath my hands
As though I'm already touching him.
As though I've never stopped.
Bone of my bone.

But then
As I approach

At first I do not recognize
The scent of Freddie Lounds
Because it is unbelievable.
Because I do not want to believe it.

Because it represents the first link
In a chain of lies which I cannot see the end of.
The scent is fresh
Hours old.

I consider
The scalpel on my desk.
A small blade
But it would be enough.
My hands would be enough.
My teeth would be enough.
I would drink the blood

From Will Graham's heart
Like a glass of wine.

Will:

Because I am cruel, possibly evil
And shamefully unheartless
I can't ignore the solid reality
Of Hannibal next to me
Filling my eyes, always
Even when I'm not
Looking at him.

I want him
Have wanted him
Will want him
For how long?
Will he drain from this wound
Like poison once we're apart?
Will I wake up from him?

It's one thing to dream. It's another
To understand the nature of the dream.

Hannibal:

Once the last book
Has been thrown into the fire
Will turns to me, smiling, pulling
Me to him by the hips.

Will:

I was thinking
If we're saying goodbye
To your office, we might as well
Give it the send-off it deserves.

Hannibal:

What a charming idea, Will.

I try to proceed as though
The rigging of our exquisite theater
Has not just been exposed
Taking care to conceal
My disillusionment from him
Struggling when he's this close.
As close as my own breath.

My own heartbeat.
Blood of my blood.

When his blunt fingers move to my belt
I pull it free myself, steering him
Across the room to the ladder
Pulling off his shirt
Putting his back to the wood
Raising his arms, crossing his wrists
At the rung above his head.
I can smell his excitement
As I belt him in place.

Once the sad and unimaginative aftershave
Has been sweated out of him
Will smells like the sea.
Not the tropical paradise
Of sun-kissed family vacations, but salt
Plantlife and decay. Heavy minerals.
Pollution and unknowable depths.
He smells like soft bodies contained
Within armored shells, and the darkness
Of caves where drifting clouds of bacteria
First took hold of each other
And all life began.

I blindfold him with my tie
Breathing more easily as my mask
Falls away like a sheet of melting snow.
I'm free to follow the lines of him
Tasting them with my eyes -
Narrow waist curving up, becoming
His ribcage, filling and sinking
Like a sail in the wind.
Triceps tense beneath sensitive skin
The warm invitation of his neck
Petal-delicate mouth, tumbling
Hair perfect in its carelessness.
Face lifted to me in expectation.
If I were to draw him now
I would make a Saint Sebastian
To break the masters.

If I were to cook him now
Jellied, I would set those blushing cheeks
In aspic made from his bones.
Cured, I would smoke him with chokecherry

To fill my storehouse for winter. Flesh
Of my flesh.

I take my time undressing him
Touching and tormenting him, until
He is half hard, jaw tight, straining.
The body, at least, does not lie.
I touch the most honest part of him.
Paying homage on my knees
I can't help thinking of Hopkins
Tormented poet priest, kissing
The rod of an Almighty who ignored
His most desperate prayers.

When I feel Will about to break, I bite
Just hard enough to focus his mind
Finding pressure points, sensitive tendons.
He whimpers and twists, pulling
Against the belt which only makes me
Bite harder, glaring up at him.
But then the fear.

I feel it happen, feel Will
Recognize the Other
Who is also me.
He bucks against the ladder
Like a frightened colt.
I smell the acidic finish
Of panic in his sweat.
I rise to my feet
Watching him.
He presses himself back
Against the ladder
Limbs tense
Mind scrambling.
I watch him.

And then I relent
Bending to him
Like a reed in the wind
Touching him gently
Holding him to me
Kissing the softest hair
Just above his ear.

It's alright, Will.
I'm here.

He relaxes
Trembling in my arms.
I hold him tighter, mask
Slipping back into place.
When I untie him
He casts the blindfold aside
Before launching himself at me.

Our warring carries us
From the ladder
To the floor
To the couch
To the floor again
Where we lie limp, battlefield littered
With clothes and torn paper.

I think of the nights and days
So few but promising so much
Which have found us
Just like this, and I want
To ask him when the lie
Became real, became a lie
Became real again? Whether
He has changed
Wants to change
His mind.
The street light filters cool
Metallic through the curtains
And across the room
The fire has gone out.
I watch him.

Will:

What?

Hannibal:

Nothing.
Just admiring.
You're beautiful, Will.

Has anyone ever told you that?

Then I'm happy
To have been the first.

Achilles Before The Arrow

Chapter Summary

Will remembers his first encounter with Achilles and is forced to decide whose side he's on.

Will:

When I was twelve I went on a field trip
To the Cincinnati Art Museum.
It was the first school I'd gone to
With enough money for something like that.
One of the rare times my dad
Landed a job in the suburbs.
I was still new. The seat next to me
On the school bus was always empty.

The museum seemed enormous
Made me aware of every frayed seam
In my clothes, which had come
From a garbage bag pulled
From a charity bin at the grocery store.
The museum, with its dustless glass
Its miles of marble floor, could tell
I didn't quite pass in those clothes.

~

At 2:15pm on March 10, 1977
Alana tells me she dreams
Of drowning in Hannibal
Being exposed and helpless
Unable to move as water
A cold feasting vacuum
Fills and consumes her.

I can't pretend I don't feel
Possessive of Hannibal
As she tells me this. That there isn't
A grasping creature inside of me
Tightening its hold, rejecting her empathy.
I remind myself that our betrayals

Hers and mine, were very different.
Hannibal was her friend and mentor
Years before he became her lover.
I can't pretend I don't feel jealous
Weary to death of pretending.

I want to tell her I'm sorry.
I want to tell her she was right.
I want to tell her goodbye.
I want to tell her I'm afraid
And unafraid at once.

~

I entered the museum half-expecting
To be turned away as unsuitable
Offensive to such clean splendor.
I trailed my classmates as we were led
Through one palatial room after another.
I had never been to an art museum before
Had only ever seen them on TV
As backdrops for intrigue or romance.

That day, for the first time
I was not only allowed, but instructed
To stop and look at beautiful things.
To think about what I was seeing, and
What had moved someone to create it.
And as I stopped and looked, I felt the world I knew
Creeping into this place which didn't know me
Like fresh air entering a sealed room.

~

At 10am on March 11, 1977
I meet Margot halfway down
The two-mile drive to Muskrat Farm
Where an inexplicable gazebo
Rises empty in a clearing.
Margot arrives on horseback
The beautiful bay mare creating
Small explosions of mud
From beneath the melting snow.

Even here, on her family's property
In expensive riding clothes
Margot doesn't quite seem to fit.
We don't have much to say to each other.

Thanks to Hannibal
Her brother will spend the rest of his life
Bound to a wheelchair, disfigured
Margot the unofficial manager
Of the Verger Meat Packing empire.
Her hair is in a fishtail braid
And I feel as though we are fragile
Young and old at once. She tells me
She's going to survive this.

I want to tell her we both will.
I want to tell her about the forest
And the fireflies.
I want to tell her I'm sorry.
I want to tell her I wanted us
To find happiness.

~

As I thought about those generations of artists
I began to feel they had made these things
For me as much as for anyone else. Art was meant
To wait, to reach out, demand to be *seen.*
The museum guide led us into
A vast high-ceilinged room of statues
Where I found myself looking
At the figure of a man.

~

At 7pm on March 12, 1977
I'm sitting in Hannibal's dining room
Beneath the painting of Leda
Opening to her swan
While the fire eats our silence.
A lamb lies between us
Ribs rising up from heavy meat
Like the skeleton of a small boat.
Butterflies made of painted feathers
Decorate the table, perched
Among flowers and fruit.

Thematic?

Hannibal:

I suppose so.

Will:

Sacrifice.
Transformation.
You're a little early
For Easter.

Hannibal:

Do you know
What an imago is?

Will:

A winged insect
Fully developed.

Hannibal:

And in psychoanalysis?

Will:

An unconscious ideal.
Someone we search for
All our lives.

Hannibal:

But can only ever
Find echoes of.
What would happen, I wonder
If such a person truly existed?

Will:

It wouldn't end well.

Hannibal:

I suppose
Dreams never do.
A dream is defined, in part
By our waking. Will

If I were to say to you
Tonight. Leave with me
Tonight, leaving
Nothing but a note

Would you say yes?

~

Will:

He stood in white marble, wearing nothing
But thin sandals laced up his ankles
A shield strapped to his arm
Plumed helmet disavowed at his feet
Sword held loosely in his strong hand.
His exposed penis was startling
Hardly bigger than my own, held
In its nest of curls like a sleepy vegetable.

I looked away at once, cheeks hot
To find the plaque which named him -
Achilles Before The Arrow.
We'd had a unit on Greek mythology.
Achilles' story was one of violence, pride and its fall
But looking at him, I thought there must be
A mistake. His weapon was lowered
Nothing heroic or aggressive in his pose.

Weight on one foot, his other leg
Barely bent, thigh rotated out.
A graceful line from his ankle, up his flank
Through his spine and the long curve
Of his neck. The movement was of turning
Slowly to look back, a wave of curls breaking
Around his beautiful face lifted into the light
Full of stillness and longing.

~

At 7:15pm on March 12, 1977
I'm thinking fast while trying
To appear at ease, mildly surprised
Knowing Hannibal will smell my fear
If I let it burn. Not trusting
My Self to speak.

Hannibal:

There's so much I want
To show you, Will.

Will:

Why me?

Hannibal:

Because you've lived your whole life
In that dark hotel room with the curtains closed
And I want to give you light. Because
You're hungry and I can feed you.

Will:

Jack would never let us go, just
Like he couldn't let go of Miriam Lass.
He would never stop looking. And

I've spent so long hiding
From myself, from everyone
From Jack. Just once
I want him to see me.
To see the truth of me, the way
He wants to see
The truth of you.

Hannibal:

To see this through
To the end.

~

Will:

I had seen red paint-splatter violence
Where strong men with swords howled, running
Through rainstorms of arrows to collapse in the dust
But this Achilles was waiting for one.
The one he knew was meant for him, and
The meaning of the title changed in my mind
From one of time to one of judgment
Or sacrifice.

As had so often happened to me
I suddenly found myself suffocating
In feelings I didn't understand
Sickening me with their nameless weight
Making everything else fall away -
Floor tilting beneath my feet, mind
Lifted on a wave, then plummeting
Into the swirling dark below.

~

At 9:05pm on March 12, 1977
Hannibal isn't acting as though
He expects me to stay the night
Waving off my offer
To help clean up after dinner.
He says we both have a lot to do
Before Sunday.
He walks me into the marble foyer
Holds my coat open and draws close
Behind me as I put it on, letting me
Feel and smell his warmth at my back.
The house feels bigger around us
Cavernous, drawing breath
Through lungs the size of cathedrals
While we linger in its shadows
Matchstick thin, easily lost.

Are you sure
You don't want me to stay?

He smiles a little at that
Chin down as he buttons my coat
And I want him. He says
He's always wanted me to stay.
Carefully winding my scarf
Around my neck, he says
We have plenty of time.

~

I told myself someone would notice
If I looked at Achilles too long.
Someone would notice if I started to cry
But I couldn't bring myself to turn away.
I didn't want to leave him there
Frozen in the turn
Waiting for the arrow
Unwilling to save himself.

Inevitably the museum guide summoned us
To follow her into the next room, forcing me
To walk away from the statue, my grief
A living thing dying in my chest
Pinching the inside of my wrist
Hard to keep from crying, looking back
To where he remained on his plinth.
One statue in a room of statues.

~

At 5:39pm on March 14, 1977
My dogs are mapping the house
In rainwater and mud, just returned
From a long walk in the woods.
I stand in the living room
Amid the evidence of life -
Boots and shoes by the door
Fishing poles and tackle
Books on the shelves
Dresser full of clothes
Food and water for the dogs
Dishes in the drying rack.

I am here.
I am not here.
I don't know how
To explain this.

Fifty miles away from here
Hannibal is cooking.
Preparing Jack's last meal.
Waiting for me to join him.
To kill and run with him.

Hannibal is not here.
Hannibal is here.
When I turn on the bathroom light
I find him in a bottle made of thick amber glass
Its label handwritten in French
The liquid within a heated darkness.
When Hannibal said he would introduce me
To a finer aftershave, naturally
He meant *his* aftershave.

It smells like him.
It does not smell like him.
Unstoppered it summons me
With the urgency of a scent hound
Called to its quarry's trail, but
A dream is defined
In part, by our waking.
The aftershave only smells
Like a piece of him.
A memory of him.
I know I'll never use it.

In the living room
Dogs circle my legs
Thrash happily on the rug.
I scan my books, removing
A volume bound in yellowing ivory linen.
Tucked between soft pages and sooty typeface
I find Achilles, naked in sandals and sunlight
Downy edges starting to chip, still
Turning, looking, waiting.

~

Before leaving the museum
We were allowed ten minutes in the gift shop
Where I found *Achilles Before The Arrow*
On a fifty-cent postcard. I didn't have
Fifty cents, would never beg a loan, but
I knew I couldn't leave without him.
I took the postcard from its rack
And slipped it under my shirt.

~

At 6:10pm on March 14, 1977
The phone rings. It's Alana telling me
Every ounce of shit has hit the fan.
The FBI knows everything -
The murder of Randall Tier
The entrapment of Hannibal Lecter.
Warrants have been issued for me and Jack.

Unspoken, she and I both know
Jack has nothing left to lose
And only this chance to catch Hannibal.
I tell her goodbye and hang up.
I stare at the phone in its cradle
Imagining I can already hear sirens.

~

I held the postcard against my stomach
Sweating all the way back to school.
When I finally made it home that day
I went straight to my room and locked the door.
Bent over the postcard, rapt, I stared
At the picture for hours, aching for more
But it was what I could have
And it had to be enough.

Hannibal
You told me once
Beauty is never necessary
But you knew that was a lie.
Beauty is as necessary as air
Water
Food
Love.
If we deny
What's necessary
It's because we fear
The power of our need.

At 6:23pm on March 14, 1977
I pick up the phone
And dial your number.
I listen to the indifferent mechanics
Of my call crossing the miles to you
And then you're here with me.
Your voice in my ear -
Rough velvet
Palming steel.
Your voice not knowing
I'm there with you.
The voice with which
You would greet a stranger.
I hold my breath, and then

I tell you
They're coming for us.
I tell you to run.

Blood Then

Chapter Summary

> Hannibal reflects on destiny and lost chances as everyone convenes for the final showdown.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hannibal:

In my kitchen
I stand slicing onions
For hart liver bourguignonne.
A strong hart, taken down
By a swift, unflinching hunter.
As soon as he showed me the cut
I saw the destiny
Of that slick plum-colored continent
Newly emerged from the depths of its sea.
Ingredients know
What they are meant to be
Even when they resist.
Even when they run.
I am not immune
To this denial of purpose
And I have never known it
More inescapably
Than I do tonight.

I've left the front door unlocked
For Jack to let himself in.
I listen to his steady, unhurried footsteps
Moving through my house, closer until
He stands at the porcelain demarcation
Of my kitchen, smiling at me
As I chop garlic.
He apologizes for being early.
He says the food smells good.

I think about the hunter's knife
Angling sharp teeth towards the hart.

I want to direct Jack to the pantry
For a bottle of pinot noir.
We could drink together
While I finish preparing dinner.
He could decide to set aside
The plans he's made for this night.

Jack thanks me for my friendship
And by this I know his choice
The hunter's choice, has been made.
A threshold irrevocably crossed
As the knife begins eating
Through hide, flesh, and muscle
Intent upon this harvest
All means to this end.
The uncut pearls of garlic
Shiver as I brace my hands
Against the countertop.
Blood, then.

Jack catches my knife in the back
Of his hand steel burning
As it sinks. I am vaulting
Over the counter to meet his attack.
It won't matter now if the onions burn.
If the bottle of wine remains unopened.
Glass shatters and blows land
We two locked together
In this primordial contretemps -
A motion out of time
Until I bury a broken shard
Deep in his neck, rending
Sending him gasping
Away from me, calling
Forth the waterfall
Of blood, then.

It doesn't matter now
If the beautiful liver
Cut from that young animal
Spoils uneaten.
It feels good to throw my body
A knife in each hand
Against the door of the pantry
In which Jack has locked himself.
It feels good to smell his blood
As it soaks into his clothing. Blood
Like thick hot stew, meat

Bones and breath I claim for my own
I *claimed* for my own, knowing
We were always meant for this.

Alana's entrance -
A cue for laughter in a farce gone wrong
As she whispers my name from the end of the hall.
The deceived woman pointing a gun
At her heartlessly deceiving lover.
It is strange to be unmasked before her
To know in this moment nothing
Can restore the scales to her eyes.
It doesn't matter now
How the hart woke before dawn
Long legs stretching
Out from sleep, hooves stepping
Through cold winter grass
Warm breath misting
In the silence between trees.
Alana couldn't let me kill Jack
Both of them determined
To offer up their lives
On Truth's burning altar.

I want to ask whether she is satisfied
With the benedictions of her deity -
Is it really better to know, Alana?
Answer carefully.

I tell her to walk away.
I tell her to not be brave.
She could still run home and lock her doors.
I would let her go, but
That doesn't matter now.
She pulls the trigger, on cue once again
Each wish of death scored hollow.
Blood, then.

Alana runs from me
And it doesn't matter now
That the hart might have dodged the hunter's bullet.
Perhaps it never mattered.
There's nowhere to hide when blood is chosen.
No act of bravery which can't be meaningless.
No devotion so selfless it can't be rejected.
When every flicker of life taunts, challenges
The unstoppable wave, there is no sweetness pure enough
No innocence too sacred, nor love too rare.

No amount of sky empty enough to carry the panicked swans
As their nests shatter, spilling half-formed bodies
Bones whitened in the rain blackened by the fire
Pouring endlessly from the hands of those set
To carving the world upon their pyre
Smoke the horizons of their ken
Every oracle pouring forth proclaiming
Blood, then!

The hart could have been among them that morning
To raise the alarm of the hunter advancing.
August stags and crane-necked does all retreating
Into the forest's deep green dream of itself. Fawns nuzzling
Close to their mothers in the darkness
Speckled suckling young
Learning what it is to be mortal -
To be prey
To be meat
To be -

Will:

What are you doing?

Why didn't you run?

Hannibal:

Your scarf
Was in the lion's jaws
And the friar's message
Went astray.

Will:

What?

Hannibal:

There was no point in running
Without you.

Why
Did you come here tonight, Will?
Why didn't *you* run?

Will:

I don't
I didn't

Hannibal:

Perhaps you can't explain it
To your Self. Perhaps
You simply knew
This is where you're meant to be.

Tell me what you've imagined
Of our life together.

Will:

I really haven't
Given it much thought.

Hannibal:

You *haven't?*

Will:

I mean, I guess
I thought about watching you
Drink your first cup
Of gas station coffee.
I saw us playing cards
To pass time in hiding.
Finding classical stations
On the radio.

I wanted to see
All the places
You've drawn me in.
I imagined us
In an orchard.

I wish
I had left with you
When you asked.

Hannibal:

So do I
But it doesn't matter now.
The wheel never stops turning
And it's too late to pretend

We weren’t meant for this -
Ours the lost chance
Upon the threshold.
Premature poison
Too in love with death
To say *when.*

Blood then, will
Be our end.

Chapter End Notes

This poem. *This poem.* Back in the summer of 2020 when I started thinking about this project, one of the first and clearest ideas I had was of a poem about Hannibal unleashing himself in "Mizumono" which included the refrain, "blood then". I've been scared of this poem ever since, because I knew what I wanted and didn't know whether I would ever be able to get it right. I don't know that any poem will ever be exactly what I want, but I feel like this one might be as close as it's going to get, at least for right now.

It's also surreal to think about how this poem has evolved in bits and pieces over the last year and a half. Oddly enough, I think the turning point came in November, when I asked myself what Hannibal might be cooking for Jack. I remembered that a hart is a kind of deer, and even though the hart/heart homonym connection is probably too obvious, I couldn't resist. The hart also helped clarify the core emotion of the poem (*It didn't have to be like this*) and gave me a kind of focal point to structure all the moving pieces around.

Abigail

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Abigail:

They don't see me at first
Hannibal and Will
As I step into the kitchen.
I move silently, but
Hannibal always knows
When I'm close by.

For a moment I get to stand
Watching from the shadows
Like the ghost I've been
For so long now. It's easy
To pretend this is the truth -
If they turned to me now
They would look right through me.

Hannibal has always said
Will would be joining us.
He was saving me for Will
Like a surprise party
Making a home for us in secret -
A place where we could be
Happy.

When did I start
Wanting that? When
Did it become my only hope?

Once upon a time
There was a girl named Abigail.
She had a mother
And a father
And she was happy.

I am her.
I am not her.
I am the doll made
In her image, carrying
The last haunted chip of bone
A baby tooth
A strand of hair.

All that remains
Of Abigail.

I watch from the shadows
Wondering when
Did I stop being real?
To my father
To Will
To Hannibal?
Has anyone but me
Wondered
Where I've gone?

It's raining outside.
Will's clothes are heavy with water.
Hannibal radiates battle heat
Bloody, silently crying.
He steps close to Will
Lifts a hand to touch his face.
They kiss, and for one more moment
I want to believe
Everything hasn't fallen apart.
There is more than the violence
Which wears us, but
When they separate
Will finally senses me, turns
Trembling as his face goes gray.

His eyes light up with *Abigail*
And I want to cry, to tell him
Please don't see me.
Please forget.
It's not me.

I was never worth this.

Chapter End Notes

Reflecting on Abigail's arc within these poems, I realized I needed to give her a last opportunity to speak for herself, as herself :(It doesn't feel entirely perfect or complete yet, but again, it feels close.

Flood

Chapter Summary

Will and Hannibal finally speak to each other honestly.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will:

At the end of the world
Something broke
And then there was a wave
Which pulled everything into itself
As it rose, a gravity well monolith
Striding like a king across the world
And I could hear it coming.
When my mind was on fire
I heard the roar of water like wind
Casting my eyes to the horizon
Waiting for its darkness.

I realize now
I had forgotten that wave
Leaving it behind like a bad dream
When my fever broke.
But when I see Abigail
The vision comes back into focus
Because the wave was real.
It was always rising.

And then the cut
Deep
Impossible
The collapse
Water blacking
Out the sun

Hannibal standing
Over me, filling
Spreading
Into every inch

The knife
In his hand
A wet little claw
Of red moon.
My Janus-faced lover.
My best friend.

Hannibal:

Are you going to tell me again
That I'm incapable of heartbreak?

Will:

No.

Hannibal:

I suppose I should commend you, Will.
You promised you would make me feel this.
Are you satisfied with your success?

Will:

Yes.
And no.

He smiles
A slow sick
Blood-toothed smile.

Hannibal:

My Will, forever torn
In two, this tormented mind
Tormenting, yet still
Determined to go on.

I wanted so much more for you.
From the moment we met
I saw what you could be.
The singular creation aching
For realization within you.
Just as I saw it within Abigail.
I wanted to give you back
To yourselves. To each other.
I wanted to keep you for my Self
But when I opened
The gates of my palace

To welcome your arrival
I found you already inside.

How did you do that?
I built my walls so well
And for so long.
Where did you find the key?
Or was there perhaps
A secret spy tunnel full
Of deadly water and broken glass?
How did you manage
To find me, Will?

Will:

Hannibal -

He crouches
In front of me, hair
Wicked into dark
Sticky points
Clothes fraying
Along
Broken seams.

Hannibal:

This is the worst part.
I know.
But we've chosen blood
So now you're going
To tell me the truth.

Will:

It was real.

Hannibal:

I know.
It had to be
To be believed.
You were a truth
Within a truth
Within a truth, yet
You chose the lie.

Will:

I think
I'm dying.

Hannibal:

You will be, *meilasis*
For a very long time.
Thinning your portion
A little more each day
Telling your Self it's enough
To live on.
Remembering
What you brought
To this altar.

Will:

He stands
Watching me as
He holds his hand
Out to Abigail
And she takes it
The look
On her face
Saying
I always knew
It would end
This way.

I try to
Get up, but
My body is
Flooding
Crumbling
In on itself

Hannibal
Turns her
To face me
Holding her
Gently, then
Draws his claw
Across her throat
Lowers her
To the floor
And walks out.

The wave is breaking
Through Abigail

Through
The river mouth
Reopened.

I drag my Self
Into our stream
Its water warm
Watching it pool
Around my fingernails
As Abigail's body
Jerks beneath
My hand.

I think I hear
Our hearts beating
Rushing to push
Every drop of blood
Out. I think
I hear our blood, but
It was raining
Wasn't it?

There's so much
Blood inside of us.
We shouldn't be able
To walk without spilling
Like brimming cups.

Abigail's eyes have closed
White lips parted
Her skin still child soft.
Hannibal's greatest gift
And revenge.

You tried to warn me
I want to say.
You told me to stay
In the stream.

From where I lie
In the blood which runs
Over the smooth cool tile
Of Hannibal's kitchen floor
I can see the blood
Spreading from beneath
The pantry door
As the wave breaks

Over and over
Against the house.

The great dark stag
Comes to lie down
In the flood with us
Eyes rolling as he groans
Neck muscles buckling
Straining as his antlers
Slide and scrape
Against the wet tile.

I followed you
I want to say.
What were you
Trying to tell me?

The house is silent
Save for the punishing rain
Against its windows.

The stag heaves
A last dying release
And I remember
Today is my birthday.

Chapter End Notes

Another scene which was torturously difficult to adapt for this story, since "Mizumono" is one of my favorite season finales of any show ever and every line of that last exchange between Will and Hannibal is iconic. I also wanted to bring in enough threads from the other poems to make it feel as though MONSTER. could end right here - everyone in the house dies and Hannibal walks away. The End. Which, of course, isn't the case. Back in November I actually realized that MONSTER. is going to have four parts instead of three, so I've only reached the halfway mark! *deep sigh*

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